Son Preference

Sex Selection, Gender and Culture in South Asia

Navtej K. Purewal

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For my two little gems
Preeti and Eesher

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PREFACE

Many people with an interest in son preference and sex selection may suffer from what could be called 'foeticide fatigue'. Its symptoms arise out of repetitive images and the index of reports of new discoveries of scanning clinics operating illicit sex-selective business in South Asia or of the disturbing accounts of women having sex-selective abortions either by choice, cultural pressures or under duress. When I use the term 'foeticide fatigue', it is not that I see the issue as being overplayed or excessively discussed. Female foeticide needs to be discussed and debated *more*, however within a more panoramic lens which would allow for a fuller and more critical analysis and discussion. This should not merely be limited to a debate about 'women' or of the 'menace' of female foeticide, but to the multitude of social processes and institutions that surround the desire for sons. The orthodoxies around how sex selection and foeticide are commonly discussed as a 'social evil' reflect the narrowness within which the issue has come to be framed. It avoids the bigger picture of son preference as a foundational ideology of social relations and social reproduction. Moreover, it ignores the more sinister, mundane expressions of son preference that exist within people's everyday lived realities, the images that are transmitted and the gendered values, expectations and aspirations that circulate in society.

This book does not intend to set the record straight in this respect. That would be a futile mission for any one person to claim to attempt, particularly in an academic publication. Perhaps this book can be characterized as an expression of my own readings of, and fascination with, son preference. In any case, it reflects a personal journey, the origins of which I am unable to precisely pinpoint. My analysis of the social injustices of son preference has shaped who I am in a number of ways and, in this sense, it has been cathartic not only to write about something that I am intellectually interested in, but to express in my own way about something with which I also have an ontological connection. The overarching 'different-but-equal' rhetoric, which is so popularly used to justify gender inequality and injustices, not just in the region of Punjab in northwest India, but globally, should not to be taken lightly. Such rhetoric is underpinned by a sophisticated machinery of systemic tools and mechanisms that reinforce delineation, discrimination and differential expectations of men and women's achievements and life outcomes. The couching of this machinery within a purely cultural frame is problematic and, as such, requires a more penetrating analysis of culture and structure and their dialectical relationship.

Writing this book has been both a therapeutic and an uncomfortable exercise. I am indebted to postcolonial feminist methodologies and theories for the foundation and confidence they have offered me in formulating my own voice to counter both neo-orientalist and patriarchal discourses on son preference. I do not claim to occupy any authentic or authoritative stance on son preference but I do hope that the personal, political and intellectual journey that accompanies this exploration raise further questions rather than providing *answers*.

The notion of the 'girl child', so popularized as a victim in academic, government and media discourse on son preference and female foeticide, remains largely overlooked within the methodologies and approaches to exploring the phenomena of son preference. I begin this book by locating myself as an observer, participant and commentator – once having been a young girl and now a woman with two young daughters. I am also an elder sister to a sole brother. So even through these various locations, I became aware of son preference from a series of revelations that gradually revealed to me the inherent *contradictions* around the status and value of women and men. Perhaps it is because of the consciousness of these revelations that I now find it difficult *not* to view son preference or even wider society through the eyes of the girl child or woman. I feel it is a position that I too can occupy without being displaced and disconnected via 'objective' academic theorization. I have vivid reflections and memories of women around me as prominent and active social agents but, at the same time, I also recognize that they are part of an elaborate apparatus of gendered practices and inequalities, and often complicit within their own subordinate positions (see Kandiyoti 1998 and Veena Das 1976). Men too, despite their formal role as 'heads' of their households, often exhibit an inability to wield any *real* power and authority, as women operate and manage complex social arrangements and functions within social networks of support, both within family and outside of it. Gender relations of power and authority are far from uni-dimensional.

The range of seemingly logical explanations that have been presented to me as to why sons are essential to a family and why a daughter, conversely, presents a danger to a family's respect, have never sat easily with me. In fact, the politicized affinity I have with other young girls and women has pushed me to take an even stronger rejection of these explanations and justifications for son preference. This book, in many ways, reflects a personal journey to understand the many contradictions around how son preference is justified, discussed and dealt with. Over the years, this has led me to seek *less* of an explanation as to how and why son preference exists, and *more* of an inquiry into how one could possibly expect to find a simple answer to such a complex question.

My exploration of gender and son preference in South Asia spans my personal observations from childhood, but also weaves through my educational and professional experience. Having been born and raised in the United States, my consciousness about gender biases was born both out of Midwestern American patriarchal values and the Punjabi/South Asian ones of my family heritage, a blend of two highly gendered social systems. It is the ruptures and fusions between these cultural spaces that have produced

the analysis and identity position from which I speak. My observations and participation within social relations around me as a child, teenager and then as an adult have certainly impacted upon how my consciousness was formed about son preference in South Asia and the diaspora.

There are many reference points which have contributed to my interest in gender relations, biases and asymmetries. As I was growing up, my father repeatedly told me the story of my birth and his reactions to it, partly (I believe) as a personal confession that was meant to impart an education about gender norms in 'our culture'. In his reflections on that time, he explained his feelings of disappointment that I was not a boy, which was as much an individual feeling as much as a culturally collective one. While this story's narrative was also told as a means of demonstrating how 'dated' those times were, compared to more contemporary shifts that have since taken place, the narrative itself, for me, can also be located at the crux of non-assimilationist cultural survival in the US. His reflections represented one of the ways in which 'culture' so commonly gets retold through such narratives and accounts that pass through the patriarchal lens of interpretation. His attitude toward my education and opportunities, however, to pursue hobbies, interests and a career of my choice, showed how he consciously addressed this bias within himself. In this way, he responded to the heightening presence of women in education and the professional world in the West from the 1970s onward, while absorbing certain Midwestern American values into the Punjabi ones which had travelled with him in the mid-1960s. He was not just a receptacle of patriarchal values (American or Punjabi ones); he attempted to adapt his notions of 1960s gender norms in Punjab to his evolving environment in the United States. That was certainly enough to generate a questioning, curiosity and determination for me to make my own sense of the complex intermingling of culture and gender.

While my father's position on gender may have offered me an opportunity to 'practise' my own feminist perspective and critique quite early on in life through various modes of rebellion and challenge, it was my mother's role as an active, confident, dominant voice within the family and community that revealed that such gender bias was not quite so simple. Women do not merely experience discrimination. They embody the asymmetries that gender biases present to their life circumstances. Her silence, for example, during the telling of my birth story, was enough of a signal that her emotions as a new mother of a daughter did not collude wholly with my father's views and therefore could not be assumed to echo his. Her reminder that my paternal grandmother had, in fact, distributed sweets when hearing the news of my birth, something not commonly done in 1960s Punjab, was also a means of her communicating to me that there were other 'voices' out there which did not merely project dominant son-preferring attitudes, but which offered space for alternative perspectives and practices to be expressed. My mother's own family gender backdrop came through in how she told the story of what it meant to be born and brought up in Kenya in a family of all girls, having lost a brother at a very young age, and so I was again 'educated' in terms of what that meant for young women to be raised

in terms of the vulnerabilities that were perceived for women not having the 'protection' of a brother or a father. My imagination of what it must have been like for her to have grown up under such circumstances, and yet to have turned out with more gender social capital than most of the white middle- and upper-middle-class American women among whom we lived in the Midwest, made me wonder how such discriminatory and gendered structures could, at the same time, produce such strong female prototypes, embodied by my mother and the other female members of her family despite the overt rhetoric and gestures of 'male rule' within the extended family. Despite this, throughout my personal and research meanderings on the subject of women's positionality within the family unit, most strong female prototypes still choose to align themselves with the patriarchal game, rather than attempting to shake it from its roots, though this is not a blanket statement meant to dismiss all women's actions as insidiously marred by the patriarchal brush of control. I suppose this is a fundamental question and a frustration I feel about women's potential and real agency, which will become more clear to the reader toward the latter chapters of this book. Thus, many actions of consciousness remain within the 'hidden transcripts', often so coded in their projection across generations of women that young women can often only understand their complex meanings by the time they themselves have become part of the 'system'. The shift from being a daughter to a daughter-in-law and wife is one which greatly alters the possibilities for action and change, circumscribed by not only one's own parents but also by one's parents-in-law. In some senses, this book is an attempt to highlight the importance of recognizing the 'hidden transcripts' on son preference as a mode of understanding girls' and women's own gender consciousness.

Despite the developments within feminist theory, male and female roles continue to be central to the predominant model of gender in most societies. My resentment at the notion of men being protectors of women, while also being both the aggressors of women's autonomy and generally the sole inheritors of material wealth, was felt on the levels of both ideas and sentiments and produced another range of questions which I continue to pursue. The burdens that son preference places upon sons and boys to become 'men' through the pressures placed upon them by parents and society cannot be dismissed. Masculinity is not single-dimensional and does not merely generate machismo expressions. It also can include women's expressions of masculinity and of men's emasculation and even femininity. Masculinity is produced by a complex array of responses to the imperatives of economy, culture and social relations. Sons wanting to venture out and become their own 'men' may find it just as difficult as girls wanting to become their own 'women'. The structures of economy and culture meant to regulate and mediate women's autonomy and choices also operate to groom men for their inheritance of their roles within the existing power structures and social relations.

In retracing one dimension of my journey, the birth of my first daughter came with wishes for the future which spoke more of condolence than congratulation, i.e. that next time it would be a boy. Such wishes were both spoken (*aglee vaari rabb tuhanu changee cheez dave*; next time God will give you a good thing instead) or unspoken through a

polite silence or mechanical response to the news of the birth. The arrival of my second daughter brought more direct comments, less concerned with fatalism and God's will, but more with overtures of the need for either divine or technological intervention to ensure that the same 'fate' did not occur the next time. Such comments make one even more reflective about how being a woman, or man, and how one's own birth might have been understood at the time by parents, relatives, friends and others. My personal and, by this time, politicized feminist position saw my absolute joy and even relief in having two daughters rather than sons. Yet, this view seemed against the grain in some contexts and quite the norm in others, depending on the conversation and its location (private or more public discussion); son preference as an attitude, perspective or cultural expectation is not always the 'norm'.

Interventions and debates around access to new reproductive technologies during the 1990s made discussions and narrations of son preference take on a modernist discourse, a discourse fractured by parallel debates under way in the West with feminists, bioethicists and the religious right in America making public interjections on the potential dangers of reproductive technologies. Feminists and medical activists in India were meanwhile campaigning against the use of sex-selective technologies in a context of historical son preference and sex selection, eventually achieving a legal ban. The departures between the debates in the West around sex selection and those going on in India brought together the contestations of culture, technology and feminism which, from a diasporic angle, seemed non-inclusive and binding in terms of the 'field'. They were not able to adequately speak to notions of culture and gender bridging the 'here' and the 'there', borrowing from Western feminist rights discourses while also acknowledging the particularities and complexities of gender politics in South Asian contexts. Son preference transcends different contexts, discourses, places and times. This book is merely a drop in the ocean in a wider world where son preference circulates.

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INTRODUCTION

Although one of the more obvious meters of son preference is the sex ratio and other social and demographic indicators, this book uses a broader definition of son preference as its starting point: the foundation of the cultural, economic, social and ideological arguments that justify the preference for, if not the deification of, sons. Indeed, there are many outcomes and possibilities of son preference, ranging from family planning, child-rearing of girls and boys, gender socialization to the technological determinism that enables people to choose boys over girls in a decisive manner through the use of reproductive technologies. Preferring sons does not necessarily mean that daughters are disliked or completely unwanted, although it *can* mean this, of course. However, there is a spectrum of social, psychological and material outcomes of son preference, often hidden behind the subtleties of 'double standards', i.e. differential treatment by means of freedoms, taboos and restrictions. Encasing many of these outcomes is an underlying, essentialist understanding that sons represent strength in a masculine sense while daughters, who represent femininity and thus weakness, will one day belong to the home of another man and should thus be seen as a futile investment. Cultural expressions, in public and private discourse, of son preference will be addressed in an attempt to present a critical perspective on how this highly topical subject is spoken about, understood and discussed.

Stories and narratives are an important medium through which notions of culture and questions about that culture are transmitted. It is the multiple layering of how such stories are told that interests me: by whom, whether in third or first person, or even whether they are conveyed as fiction or narrativized 'fact'. When I reflect on some of these initial reactions and sentiments around 'culture and truth', as explored by Rosaldo (1993), I can trace a series of stories, told to me by relatives, acquaintances, friends and even people unknown to me, about their own memories of moments or events in South Asia, Britain or the US pertaining to their analysis of the preference for sons. Parallel to those stories are my own, which have, over the years, been told and narrativized from my own ever-evolving perspective. Despite having no memory of my own birth or an understanding of the gendered world I was being born into, in telling the story to my daughters (once-removed) forty years later, I almost feel as though I have acquired some sense of ownership of the story, its analysis, and perhaps even the actual moment of my birth (and subsequently the births of my own two daughters), so that I may hold

licence to tell the story differently, more critically, from my own (feminist) perspective. Indifference about the gender of a child, or even daughter preference, can and does exist and should not be viewed merely as an exception to the rule. Daughter preference is often a conscious, counter-hegemonic position which, in the face of the masculinizing processes, values and images that abound, can be an expression of change or even a response to the lived experiences that find daughters, even more than sons, an increasingly essential asset to maintain a family's integrity and cohesion. Thus, such transmissions of culture have revealed an opportunity to 'reclaim the narrative'. This is a methodological point but is also a reflection of the wider 'project' in which this book is placed.

There are many stories that circulate which highlight the resilience of son preference. Hearing of couples striving for a son, seen as an essential ingredient to a 'complete family', takes De Beauvoir's postulations that the labelling of woman as 'feminine' is a constructed process, rather than a given, to new heights. Her statement that 'one is not born, but rather, becomes a woman' would not be palatable to a Punjabi twenty- or thirty-something couple who, in wanting to 'produce' a son, are instead 'delivered' a girl. Ideally, one would hope that such a couple would recognize the possibilities of raising their daughter in a manner which might avert the gendered backdrop to 'becoming a woman' within such prescriptive, essentialist terms. However, in South Asia the intense focus upon the birth points to the moment at which men and women are born and become masculine and feminine, showing both the necessity and relevance of De Beauvoir's feminist existentialism, but also its conceptual distance to the cultural context of South Asia. Social constructivism, sadly, seems to flutter in the wind during times when the aspirations of households and communities can seemingly only be achieved by the production of a family line of male heirs, yet this is not specific to South Asian cultural contexts. In fact, Simone De Beauvoir herself was one of two sisters. Her father had desperately wanted to have a son and was disappointed with his life in only having two daughters. Perhaps due to this, De Beauvoir's parents lived a subsequent life of estrangement, with her father resigning himself to Simone's academic success, despite being a daughter, to pull the family out of abject poverty.

The cultural translation which is behind the focus upon the birth is a pivotal deciding moment about how gender frames the expectations surrounding the meanings of what it means to be born a girl or boy. The absolute joy that I felt after my brother's birth was also culturally translated and explained to me so that I understood why I was so lucky to have a brother. A brother was essential; a brotherless girl was somehow at a disadvantage in comparison to a girl who had at least one brother. As a young girl, I remember this explanation seeming ludicrous, yet I logged it in my mind as 'something that I must come to understand', as being one of the foundation stones of the 'culture' that I belonged to.

Other experiences and observations during childhood visits to India also made their mark on me. Through the eyes of a young girl from the US visiting a village in Punjab, I saw the pressures that were placed upon boys and young men to follow in their fathers'

footsteps and to exist within certain prescribed notions of 'becoming a man'. Suddenly men's privilege did not seem to me to be necessarily one-sided. The burdens upon men and boys also need to be worked into any kind of understanding of how gender operates in regulating and maintaining social, economic and cultural forms. During that same trip to Punjab, I also experienced a deep sense of insecurity as a 'woman-in-the-making' because I did not share many of the culinary or practical household skills displayed by the girls and women around me. My attentions, as a middle-class girl, growing up in the West had been focused upon education, sports, music, achievements and hobbies. But in Punjab, I watched in awe of how girls, from a very young age, despite attending school during the day, were involved in every aspect of running the household alongside their mothers and other female relatives. From cooking for a workforce of agricultural labourers, making butter and yoghurt, kneading the *chapatti* dough, peeling vegetables, to running errands in the neighbourhood, girls and women were an active and dominant force within the family and community. This, of course, was not necessarily a liberating platform. The interpretations of daily life there and subsequent narrativized accounts were meant to transmit a sense of caste privilege (coming from a land-owning family in rural Punjab), but which did not offer a sense of gender privilege. In fact, it would become increasingly clear that caste privilege could, in fact, impact negatively upon possibilities for more autonomous gender roles. Historically, rural land-owning families have upheld the ideology of son preference as a logic of survival and reason. The connections between gender and caste are not merely intersecting forces. Each frames the other respectively, revealing how difficult, if not impossible, it is to make generalized statements around questions, for example, of why, how or by whom son preference exists.

The dynamic culture of the family often hinges upon the tensions between women's power and men's power and therefore cannot be simply understood through a framework of 'bargaining' or as a system of compliance by women. The question of son preference, alongside other gender asymmetries, requires different types of enquiry and explorations that account for dynamism, contradiction, challenge and change. There are a number of inherent contradictions around how gender relations in the West have been couched within an equal-rights framework, while in South Asia, gender relations have been understood as an outcome of separate roles and responsibilities of men and women. These two ways of making sense of gender may seem mutually exclusive of one another. Ortner (1972) was one of the early commentators who problematized the neat separation so commonly placed between gender and culture in the West and third-world societies in highlighting universal 'fact' and cultural particularism through a view of pan-cultural traits of women's status across societies.

The concept of diaspora presents a further vantage point from which to explore gender and culture. Diaspora speaks not only of a 'here' and 'there', but also enables a less bounded field of study which can see the 'here' in the 'there' and the 'there' in the 'here', making any analysis of culture less easily fixable or locatable (Brah 1996; Kalra et al. 2005). The position that diaspora offers is by no means an authentic one or

more epistemologically sound to other research-observer locations. It merely disrupts the notion of 'the field' of study as a place which can be sealed off. The vantage point of diaspora from the onset, creates slightly uncomfortable understandings of culture and gender, with *either* perspectives on gender in South Asia that do not dare to engage the 'field' in South Asia with less authentic diasporic subject positions *or* those which uncritically draw lines of continuity between all South Asian gendered cultural practices, whether in South Asia or the diaspora. Indeed, the potential for transcending these two modes of representation have been set out through the contributions of various commentators (Chow 1993, Grewal and Kaplan 1994, Brah 1996, White 1992, Gardner 1995, Clifford 1997).

While my own 'cultural education' has provided a backdrop of years of participant observation, my intellectual journey began formally as a student. As a final-year undergraduate student in the US in the early 1990s, for a women's studies course I read a book by the American journalist Elizabeth Bumiller called *May You Be the Mother of a Hundred Sons*. The title and topic of the book – its cover and sleeve – had an immediate appeal to me as someone who had been thinking about and questioning the obsession with having sons since as early as I could remember. Having just returned from India after a semester study abroad programme, I felt some sort of connection to the book and its topic. I thought I had, at last, found something that would resonate with my sentiments, uncertainties and questions about gender relations in South Asia – from an 'outsiders' view. I was looking for an explanation of why son preference is so prevalent in India in a way that broke it down into concepts I could apply to what I had seen in the diaspora. Despite being from a South Asian-Punjabi-Sikh background, I too saw myself as an 'outsider', and the release of the 1991 Census sex ratio data and the accompanying media coverage about India heightened my desire for understanding and 'knowing'.

My reluctance to unquestioningly adopt a viewpoint on the configurations of gender in South Asia were drawn from some of the questionings of identity, location and knowledge that diaspora throws out to those of us who have always lived in a multi-locational field. Through my readings during my undergraduate studies at Vassar College in upstate New York, I developed a distinct sense that women and gender studies in the US, at that time, was still largely an intellectual homage to Western feminism which had some, but limited, applicability to the questions I was interested in. So my thirst for knowledge about South Asia continued to grow through travels and reading. Yet, while it was the 'facts' that I had been keen to grasp about society and social change in South Asia, it was actually *knowledge production* on South Asia which I was becoming interested in. As soon as I began reading Bumiller's book, for instance, I (subconsciously) realized that I had very little connection to how the author approached the cultural backdrop to son preference in India, despite the insightful and rich interview material contained in the book.

At that point, it was the colourful pictures of gender oppression in India that captured my attention; yet those very things did not offer much in terms of an 'insider's' view (if

in fact there is one!) or a more probing discussion of the complexities around culture and gender that I was looking for. It was not just the author's positionality as a white American woman writing about her travels in India that I was sensitive to. I too had travelled and spent time in India as an 'American' student through a study abroad programme around the time of the book's publication, though I would not have comfortably identified myself as an 'American' without layering it with numerous other labels. It was my discomfort with wholly situating myself within the West that would be a constant feature of my journey to make sense of gender and culture in South Asia. The book sat among my school and college books in my room in my parents' home in a small town in Ohio, the place I was raised and socialized, a place seemingly far away from a 'journey among the women of India' that Bumiller had embarked upon. I did not pick the book up again for about ten years, having really only held onto it because of the topic it was addressing. No other book during my college days had grabbed my attention as this one had, yet I admittedly could only bear to read the book once because of a subconscious reaction to how it had framed the discussion. I began to consider why it was that I was so interested in son preference and what was so special about this book, when it had not spoken to my own sentiments, politics, analysis or sensibilities. Bumiller's book merely awakened my own sensitivities around the imperiousness of much scholarship and Western feminism and my desire to try to speak from a more comfortable location through the articulation of a perspective that subverted the Western cultural, imperialist gaze.

Studies on gender in South Asia have always raised questions around epistemology, voice, subject formation and knowledge production. Some, I believe, present exemplary acknowledgements of power and location while others have continued to look through the lens of the supposed 'objective' outsider who has entered a demarcated 'field'. To start this book with a reference to Bumiller's text could seem misleading. It was not a formative text for me – it was published at a time when postcolonial feminist voices were just emerging in response to the reservoir of orientalist scholarship on gender in the third world. Yet it did contribute to my intellectual development in terms of raising my awareness of the politics of research, just as other pieces of research have. If anything, writing this book represents a challenge to that type of enquiry via the development of a sensitivity toward how various commentators, on issues that I had been thinking about and was committed to personally and politically, had dealt with representations of gender relations in 'other' societies. It became crucial to question just 'who' was speaking and how such commentators understood women's positionality in relation to the location of culture. Did the supposed objectivity of the highly trained, experienced ethnographer, demographer or social scientist hold an implicit position of authority underpinned by the credibility of the tools and methods he or she relied upon to generate the 'data'. The onslaught of the postcolonial feminist critique to studies of 'traditional' Asian societies (Narayan 1993, Chow 1993, Rajan 1993) asked these types of question, which saw some acknowledge the significance of epistemology, power and knowledge, while other researchers and commentators continued to produce knowledge on gender in South

Asia bereft of reflexive gestures. It began to occur to me that these academic accounts should be judged equally as *narratives* or *stories* alongside the depictions and tales told to me throughout my childhood – in this way I began to consider the basis upon which academic scholarship had come to be viewed as a more authoritative voice.

THEMATIC OVERVIEW

This book builds upon debates within the existing literature, while also drawing upon primary empirical research emerging from a continuum of 'fieldwork'. This fieldwork includes interviews, ethnographies, participant observation and focus groups done over a period of five years in a range of different settings ranging from weddings in and outside of India, a women's college campus in Punjab, a high school in rural Punjab, activists, researchers, medical professionals and relatives and family contacts. My 'field', as an expression of how ideologies of culture and gender can travel more easily than they can be fixed (Clifford 1997) has spanned rural and urban Punjab, Chandigarh, Delhi, Lahore, London, Birmingham, California and Ohio. My 'field' is one that has travelled with me; this has made it difficult to demarcate a constituent community or geographic place in which I have conducted this study. Framing my field in this way should offer insights into my approach to examining son preference, which throws up more questions than answers.

In Chapter 1 I trace and map out knowledge production on gender in South Asia, with particular reference to how the backdrop of son preference has been presented and represented in selected pieces of literature from a range of disciplinary perspectives. I begin with this chapter as a means of alerting readers to the idea that the area is one in which there is a consensus on its anti-women nature, yet it has also seen the creation of son preference within scholarship as an object, which I believe raises a set of contestable, debatable issues. In this regard, more critical commentary on epistemology and location in order to shift the objectifying aspects of this area of scholarship is required.

Chapter 2 locates son preference within a postcolonial frame. The chapter begins by tracing the identification of son preference through the 'discovery' of female infanticide (the killing of newborn baby girls) by the British in the nineteenth century in India and the significance of this to the 'civilizing mission's' utilization of gender for its wider objectives of social control through social reform. A number of cases will be highlighted as they appear in official documents written by the British administrative authorities at the time. Drawing upon the works of Malhotra (2002), Panigrahi (1972), Oldenberg (2002), Sen (2002) and Bhatnagar et al. (2005), the manner in which the 'specific' is brought into the 'general' will be emphasized as a critical contribution of colonial scholarship and policies to the evolution of son preference within the wider social realm of colonial and postcolonial South Asia. The chapter will also look to contemporary engagements with son preference through a postcolonial lens. Hence, the chapter will be informed by a postcolonial critique of historical and contemporary discourses on son

preference and female infanticide/foeticide while suggesting that the threads that run across colonial and postcolonial discourse on son preference reveal an interesting set of questions around how and why women are 'missing' from official discussions.

While son preference may not necessarily be held as a belief uniformly or even at all in many contexts, son preference and the sex ratio are most often used to identify gendered discrimination. Chapter 3 illustrates how son preference is understood within a number of different strands of thought. The tendency to look toward 'women', rather than 'men', or more critical conceptualizations of gender, is identified as one limitation to the study of son preference to date. While son preference is spoken of in terms of cultural beliefs and practices, such as inheritance, the sex ratio has been used as an indicator of gender equality and inequality, statistically and demographically in Asia. Both the utility and limits of statistical tools in formulating a full picture or understanding of son preference will be posed as a follow-up to the discussion of Chapter 1, as one of the founding, 'mapping' traditions of studies of son preference.

There is immense diversity across Asian societies in terms of how gender relations are articulated and experienced, despite certain overarching gender ideologies used to regulate women's movement and sexuality. Amid this multitude of gendered codes and practices, the desire for sons and the discriminatory preference for sons over daughters can be seen as the product of the intersections of gender, material wealth and assets, power, kinship and social relations, which constitute a *political economy*, rather than merely a culture of son preference. Variations of the expressions of gender, including daughter preference, can produce unexpected outcomes of, for example, greater reliance by parents upon girls in old age and increased biases toward daughters as a result of increased pressure upon men and the failure of many to live up to parental expectations and aspirations. My emphasis will specifically be upon how political, material and social processes have shaped the political economy of gender, resulting in a dominant ideology of son preference, but with important and often overlooked transgressions.

Chapter 4 highlights anti-sex selection activism as a distinctive political and civil society movement. To date, the literature on son preference and sex selection has been primarily concerned with understanding it as a *practice*; resistance, negotiation and opposition have been more or less analytically ignored. This chapter will focus upon responses to son preference and sex selection, examining policy and official anti-female foeticide activism, as well as other 'acts' of anti-foeticide and anti-son preference. A distinct anti-sex selection movement has emerged that crosses national boundaries and which involves not only feminist activists, but also concerned people from within the health sector and wider society. Anti-sex selection activism is an important articulation of collective engagements with son preference. Such activism presents challenges to more crude interpretations of son preference and skewed sex ratios as a cultural phenomenon, having a one-way impact upon women and gender imbalances. The networks and alliances forged across various boundaries are evidence of the powerful potentials that social activism can have upon public discourses on such topical issues. The chapter

will attempt to theorize resistance to sex selection and son preference in terms of its location within postcolonial societies vis-à-vis reproductive technologies, information communication technologies (ICTs) and feminist politics and what they represent within what is becoming an increasingly transnational issue and debate.

Chapter 5 will provide an overview of some of the key debates on gender and reproductive technologies from a diasporic position, while developing a theoretical analysis of sex selection and 'choice' as they pertain to the use of new reproductive technologies (NRTs) for sex selective purposes. Selective technologies (e.g. amniocentesis and ultrasound scan followed by abortion) and pre-selective technologies (methods that allow intervention before conception) have introduced more choices for those wishing to sex select. Recent scientific developments have made it possible to 'produce' a boy or girl child through such patented techniques as the Ericsson Method, separating the x and y chromosomes before conception to increase the chances of having either a boy or a girl. The application of these technologies to the vast array of gendered and cultural contexts is significant for wider debates about reproductive choice, ethics and gender. This chapter will provide an insight into some of the critiques of NRTs by feminists and other social scientists and include a discussion of gender, reproductive choice and culture as they relate to debates on sex selection in South Asia and Britain, with diaspora used as a frame that problematizes the respective 'rights' and 'choice' discourses on gender and reproduction.

Chapter 6 focuses upon perceptions and engagements by young women in contemporary Punjab with son preference. Some of the voices and views in the chapter highlight what a 'live' area this is in the cultural imaginary of Punjab and that it is women's thoughts and articulations which, despite being overshadowed in the public discourses on female foeticide, have many qualitatively significant contributions to make to our understanding of recent and on-going trends that are taking place. Hence, rather than being an archaic institution of gendered rigidity, some of the outcomes and reactions to son preference are generating certain shifts.

Through the threads of each chapter, this book intends to offer a critical engagement with son preference, pointing toward key points of epistemological concern. Rather than providing any conclusive judgements or findings on how and why son preference persists as an ideology, I aim to direct the reader to some of the pauses and omissions within academic enquiry into son preference while attempting to obscure the gaze of academic scholarship itself within the wider social and cultural milieu. A number of questions around the relationship between scholarship and knowledge and the possibilities for research practices to be more reflective and reflexive are raised. The multi-sited field of a global issue is simultaneously honed in upon through a particular region, Punjab in South Asia, thus presenting a localized yet global approach to the study of son preference and gender.

1 MAPPING KNOWLEDGES OF SON PREFERENCE

INTRODUCTION

Son preference has come to be known and told through a number of dominant narratives that rely on particular epistemological assumptions. While this has different inflections across the various sites of my research in Punjab, India and the South Asian diaspora, this chapter will outline the contours of a cartography of research and enquiry which privileges certain ways of 'knowing' son preference, while often silencing or appearing oblivious to others. The production of this body of knowledge, for the most part, has centred what can be described as evidence-based academic scholarship, which has ultimately produced an empiricist knowledge-base about son preference. The outcome of this is that constructions and understandings of son preference, which rely largely upon empirically-driven tools and methods meant to illustrate, highlight and trace the declining terms of gender equity against females, have dominated the discursive field. It is not my intention, however, to criticize empirical work. Empirical, primary research in various forms has produced some of the most rich accounts and slices of social and cultural processes that offer insights into the gendered social world in which son preferential processes and practices exist. It is the representation of empirical data in the framing of arguments and explanations for *why* and *how* son preference exists – in other words, representing an empiricism that suggests that it is possible to *know* or understand son preference – which I am interested in, i.e. how the *object* of study of 'son preference' or 'sex selection' has been created and reified in academic scholarship.

In any given context of social science research, there are risks of failing to acknowledge 'multiple realities' existing outside of the frames of 'the field' and categories of analysis (Long and Long 1992). It is precisely at this point that wider questions of 'agency', 'power' and 'knowledge', as theoretical and methodological concerns of the social sciences, have much to offer in opening up the 'debate' beyond a simple anti-woman critique. While there is no dearth of sources upon which the social scientist interested in son preference can reflect, such as census data, ethnographic evidence, household surveys, observations, colonial historical records, fiction, newspaper and other media

interventions, to name a few, what is noticeable is how the breadth of material is utilized within a predominantly empiricist knowledge-producing frame.

It is not my intention, however, to highlight empiricist tendencies within the literature, but rather to utilize the empiricist slant as a means of questioning different scholarly representations of son preference. For instance, non-academic activist and discursive approaches which problematize the overemphasis on son preference as one of the key problems of gender inequality have, by and large, been left out of the 'hard facts' of social science research on son preference. A number of questions remain unanswered when exploring the utilitarian nature of the 'gaze' of academic scholarship in this respect. For example, how would one 'write in' an activist agenda within an exploration of son preference in Punjab, a place so commonly characterized historically by female infanticide and foeticide? Can counter-hegemonic voices be heard, rather than being seen merely as futile voices within a direly gendered society?

Postcolonial feminist critique offers a deconstruction of some of the disciplinary engagements using this lens of objectification, whether it be through the use of quantitative figures or of the gaze of the 'objective' outsider or ethnographer. Such a critical perspective, which looks to the historical longevity of scholarship in its intellectual context, can offer critical tools for deconstructing and understanding how the politics of culture, gender and feminist epistemology inform the terrain of academic scholarship (Visveswaran 1994, Mohanty 1991, Narayan 1997; and Mani 1990, Kumar 1994). The knowledge production based upon empirical evidence of son preference, namely the census and sex ratios on the one hand, and ethnographic 'evidence' coming out of ethnographic studies on the other, has emerged from a long history of reportage on gender, culture and the household in South Asia. The inception and evolution of discussions on son preference is worthy of examination when looking at the politics of scholarship. The links often made between nineteenth- to twentieth-century and contemporary patterns of skewed sex ratios need to be critically approached in a manner which traces the historical development of the colonial census and scholarship and its utility for the colonial exercise before applying the same epistemological assumptions to contemporary discussions of foeticide. Just as son preference had a distinct place within the colonial project, the post-independence Indian modernist project has positioned son preference within wider development discourses and policies seeking to 'uplift' women.

I will give a brief overview of selected contemporary engagements with gender and son preference, with some studies specifically looking at son preference, while others speak more generally about gender relations and dynamics, from various disciplinary standpoints and positions. Each study carries with it certain disciplinary histories of knowledge production while also occupying a positionality which is by no means outside of the scope of subjectivity. The authors and publications selected for analysis are not meant to be viewed as representative of any discipline, nor have they been chosen to represent entire trajectories of academic scholarship or discourse. Instead, they have been selected because of their significance in charting engagements with son preference, in

which there are, of course, many other contributions by other authors, all of whom could not be included here. The aim is to ask a number of questions of each contribution in terms of their reflections on their published research, how they understood or theorized gender and/or son preference, how they characterized it, the tools they used and how they located themselves within the study. All research, even that which has not involved interviews or communicated directly with people, reflects a methodology and represents a set of epistemological concerns. This chapter reflects my concerns with tracing routes toward more reflexive, critical approaches to researching son preference, which often requires the 'looking glass' to be turned back toward the commentator. This is precisely the focus, in terms of addressing a politics of research which can further contribute to a more robust intellectual project.

HISTORICIZING THE GAZE

Each discipline has generated its own type of 'gaze' toward how son preference articulates itself within South Asian societies. Whether it be orientalist, economic reductionist, or culturalist, the academic disciplines, as Said (1979) so poignantly alerted us, are at the centre of perpetuating a cultural imperialism toward cultures and populations with linkages to formerly colonized people and places. The connections between the enlightenment project and the development of the social sciences is one which is not just historical – it is a history of knowledge itself and one which informs how current scholarship has evolved out the development of certain canons. Thus, the various disciplinary contributions to 'understandings' of son preference and sex selection, each with its own methods and tools, have spoken not only on behalf of women and men in South Asia but also, it could be inferred, on behalf of the unborn female foetus. In the search for evidence and a resulting inability to see beyond the respective gazes that academic scholarship on son preference and female foeticide have generated, subsequent *silences* have been produced which offer important insights into how more critical ways of approaching son preference can be developed – outside of some of the disciplinary encasings which have resisted this to date.

My attempt to think, write and articulate on son preference and sex selection follows a long history of discourse on son preference, ranging from early colonial record-taking and reporting in the early to mid-nineteenth century to more recent demographic and anthropological literature. A historiography of the disciplinary contributions to and bounded theorizations of son preference requires first an unpicking of the hegemony of Western social constructions of the 'self' and the 'other' through understandings of cultural 'difference' and gender. Such notions of gender, 'difference' and culture were rooted in colonial social enterprise, yet these notions have continued to silence Third World women, as they are, for example, 'spoken for' within development policies which, as Spivak (1988) purported, muted subaltern voices through academic modes of rigour and enquiry.

The manner in which anthropology, demography and South Asian area studies have contributed most, in developing understandings of the social mechanisms behind the preference for sons and what some of the 'outcomes' of this might be, is revealing of the intellectual baggage that each of them carries with it in relation to son preference. Each discipline utilizes tools and methods laid out by the disciplinary concerns and questions raised from within. For instance, the demography of South Asia has its roots in the colonial enumeration exercise which was utilized for the colonial project in creating while also breaking up various social categories in generating colonial knowledge (Cohn 1996; Pandey 1990). A Malthusian discourse on population control was at the centre of the census' creation, with female infanticide providing an opportunity for imperial discourse on population to graft violence against women upon it (Bhatnagar et al. 2005). Thus the census, while providing data sets for understanding population trends and changes historically and in the present, can also be viewed critically for what purposes it serves and for what it does *not* tell us. There is, of course, a continuity of discourse from the colonial civilizing mission that accompanied the enumeration exercise to the postcolonial – 'the colonial census comes into being at the site of female infanticide' (Bhatnagar et al. 2005: 129) – where the foundation of understanding population in India was through the tools offered by the census but also supported by colonial administrative accounts of female infanticide.

The British 'discovery' of female infanticide in 1789 in Benares eventually led to the Female Infanticide Act in 1870 (which made infanticide illegal) when it was observed that the practice was most prevalent among land-owning Hindu castes (Vishwanath 1998). In Panjab, Major Lake reported to the Panjab Board of Administration in 1851 that 'it is an undoubted fact that there are some 1000 families of bedis who, for the last 400 years have destroyed all their female offspring' (Lake, in Viswanath 1998: 1105). The Bedis, a Sikh khatri caste who claimed direct descendancy to Guru Nanak and who were ranked highly among other Sikh khatri families, received girls from other lower-ranking khatri families but refused to marry their daughters to boys from lower-ranked families and hence resorted to female infanticide.

Similar 'discoveries' were made about other groups such as Rajputs who similarly occupied a conspicuous caste position and thus were said to have practised female infanticide rather than compromising their privileged status by marrying their daughters to groups lower to them. By 1870, the British 'discovery' of a bias toward the birth of sons over daughters became a colonial intervention in the Female Infanticide Act. Yet, it is less the *content* of the reporting that has caught the attention of postcolonial commentators than the *intentions* that such colonial endeavors symbolized. Lata Mani's (1990) critical view of the civilizing mission in India raises questions about colonial intentions in highlighting cultural practices such as sati and dowry. The contradictions between 'uplifting' women in India through the banning of sati and simultaneously implementing draconian measures to maintain control of the British Raj highlighted the insidiousness of social control and political domination under empire. Sen (2002)

similarly looks to how the British colonial anti-infanticide campaign began to label 'aberrant communities' who came to be 'identified in terms of caste, tribe, village, and the crime itself', as an infanticidal society. Sen's study looks to the archive of colonial records as her source of 'data' and begins the chapter with a clarification of her position as historian: 'I do not use this chapter to question the "truth" of female infanticide in India… Instead, I explore the debates that led up to the (Female Infanticide Act) law, and the colonizing strategies that the law represented' (2002: 53).

Interestingly, the archives of colonial records have provided revisionist and postcolonial commentators with a wealth of communication with regard to how gender featured in the colonial encounter. Indeed, the enumeration exercise was a central founding narrative within demographic studies in India. If we make even a tacit acknowledgement that the tools used by recent demographic studies have emerged from this history of enumeration-followed-by-'discovery', then what do such quantitative indicators say about contemporary society and economy in terms of son preference and gender? As one study of sex ratios in China clearly states, the purposes of calculating sex ratios for demographers are as follows:

> First, if they are assumed to be accurate, they indicate the gender balance in a society. This balance is determined by the sex ratio at birth and by sex-specific mortality and migration over the life course… The measured sex ratio at birth can be compared with a suitably selected 'standard' sex ratio reflecting known biological patterns to determine the degree to which infants of one sex suffer excess mortality. Second, if the sex ratios are thought to be incorrectly measured, they may be examined to determine the degree to which one gender group is systematically undercounted in a register, survey, or census. (Hull 1990)

Thus, following on from this statement, the intellectual project that demographic studies on India have charted out has been one of *finding*, as Amartya Sen's (1990) piece coins, India's 'missing women'. Emerging out of these high-profile demographic discoveries and predictions, there is an overwhelming dominance of quantitatively driven studies of son preference in South Asia, when one begins to 'map' out the field. The counting of males and females in the Indian population resulted in a surge of enquiry on the demographic outcomes of skewed sex ratios, biases toward male children and the new technologies of sex selection such as ultrasound scans and pre-diagnostic procedures. Indeed, Tim Dyson (2001) showed that when levels of enumeration fall, the numbers of women counted also falls, showing a sensitivity of the sex ratio to enumeration levels. Other studies have highlighted how population statistics are alerting us to various changes going on with declining ratios against females, including the 'intensification effect' in places like Punjab – where couples are having fewer children but where there is also an increasing desire for at least one son, thus intensifying the manifestation of son preference (Das Gupta and Bhat 1997). The knowledge produced from the use of quantitative indicators is based

upon statistical evidence showing trends of female disadvantage over time, yet utilizes assumed cultural interpretations of gender to understand and read the data. What would it mean experientially, for instance, to be the third- or fourth-born female child in a household where the 'intensification effect' was taking place (see Chapter 3)? The picture that quantitative indicators offer is an insight into population *trends*, as an outcome of gendered processes. Thus, the finding that 'excess mortality of girls continues after birth and still constitutes the main method of removing female children in India' (Das Gupta and Bhat 1997: 314) has come to constitute a widely accepted analysis of the demographic sex ratio outcomes of son preference.

An example of a 'quick-fix' demographic explanation of son preference shows a leap from an analysis of China to that of India:

> Strong male domination and discrimination against women have a long history and have not yet been fully eradicated in spite of great progress made in China, especially during the second half of this century. The current family planning policy does not allow couples to have as many children as they desire, but social and cultural traditions and daily living conditions make it very important to have a son, especially in rural areas… Progress in medical technology has made prenatal sex identification and sex-selective abortion feasible. Therefore, people with a strong desire for a son usually have the resources to bribe medical personnel to perform an illegal examination and to use sex-selective induced abortion to achieve their desire. (Zeng Yi et al. 1993, cited in Krishnaji 2001)

The quote above presents a 'commonsense' explanation of the state of affairs in China with regard to the outcomes of social patterns of son preference, sex selection and state family-planning policies. For our purposes, what is even more interesting is how the statement is utilized to speak of the Indian context: 'Only a few changes in the above text are needed to describe the Indian situation' (Krishnaji 2001: 31), which implies that statistical evidence and the analytical reading of two such contrasting national contexts as China and India can utilize the same tools yet adjust the findings according to the specificities that the data point out.

To merely view quantitative indicators as impersonal and generalizing would be to crudely and simplistically reduce that method to figures and numbers. My purpose in raising such questions is not about comparatively questioning various methods, but to look to epistemological concerns emerging out of various types of representation in the literature. Further, mixed-method analysis has become a significant means of representing son preference. The presence of qualitative analysis within quantitative enquiries and of quantitative evidence in qualitative studies shows how methods are commonly combined and mixed in tandem with one another. Some have even argued that without the gender disaggregated data or 'evidence', it is difficult for more qualitative studies to emerge:

> My own experience in China suggests that the absence of gender-disaggregated statistics on sex ratios and gendered indicators of infancy and childhood discrimination is a major factor limiting both national and community awareness. And that further advocacy and sensitization is contingent upon reliable data showing the scale, dimensions and trends in discrimination against daughters … ultimately it seems as if it is the power of statistical data which is gender disaggregated that gives credence to ethnographic voices and is persuasive in convincing national, community and familial decision-makers that it is important and necessary to allocate attention and resources to girls' development. (Croll 2000: 184)

While demography's 'field' lies in the stores of vast data sets, ethnographic techniques privilege an authenticated 'field' in locating the terrain of enquiry. One study utilizing ethnography within a journalistic style is Bumiller's (1989) book, in which the reader is taken along a 'journey' among 'India's women'. From the onset of the book, the fieldwork sets out a voyeuristic methodology, with the researcher centring herself in how the gaze is cast:

> Most Indian women may belong to what one government report calls the country's 'single largest group of backward citizens', … Indian men may beat their wives, but they worship goddesses; some of the mightiest deities in the Hindu pantheon are women, like Durga … and Kali… The condition of some Indian women is so wretched that if their plight received the attention given to that of ethnic and racial minorities in other parts of the world, their cause would be taken up by human rights groups… The 'typical' Indian woman, representing about 75 per cent of the four hundred million women and female children in India, lives in a village. She comes from a small peasant family that owns less than an acre of land, or from a landless family that depends on the whims of big farmers for sporadic work and wages. She can neither read nor write, although she would like to, and has rarely travelled more than twenty miles from her place of birth… She does not own land in her own name, or even jointly with her husband. (Bumiller 1989: 10–11)

In a chapter titled 'No More Little Girls', we are taken from this caricature, informed by generalizations of Indian women as a uniformly oppressed group, to an analysis of the issue of son preference. She discusses female infanticide among the rural poor in Tamil Nadu and sex-selective abortion (female foeticide) among the urban affluent classes of Bombay (Mumbai) as traditional and modern practices of son preference, respectively. Despite the differences between these two disparate groups, she leaves us with how (Indian) 'culture' overrides the contextual socio-economic locations in the manner in which the rich and poor, rural and urban are partaking in sex selection. This is done without any exploration of how women themselves might frame or understand the issue. Instead, Bumiller sets the questions to which the answers are already known – by the

data and newspaper headings such as 'Born to Die', which she cites widely throughout the book.

'The field' is created out of the authority of the researcher/author reflecting the concerns, questions and approach being addressed. Thus, fieldwork defined by spatial practices (in this case, 'India') results in the creation of field sites based upon problematic notions of 'shared culture' by those people living within its boundaries and depicted through the lens of the academician in control of the text. Hence, cultural practices such as son preference become part of a set of representations that are elicited when one thinks about the field in question. Repetitive appearance of such representations can only produce and reproduce a 'backward other' within the eyes of either the Indian modernist project or a Western academic audience viewing gender in South Asia through the tools and categories offered by the available scholarship. This does not enable the development of critical tools for enabling or enacting change in the position or status of women, though offering much material for 'understanding' son preference. This becomes even more crucial to a shifting of gender politics in a place such as Punjab that less typical representations are brought to the fore. Tamil Nadu provides a comparative, contrasting field – in which a matriarchal/matrilineal gendered social history provides other complications to a postcolonial critique of son preference, and hence a fuller, more complex and contested discourse on son preference.[1]

The virtual absence of an organized civil society movement or feminist movement within Punjab on the issue of son preference is notable, given the emblematic status it occupies within the academic literature. Thus, a place like Punjab can easily become constructed as a field site in its labelling as 'the killing fields' or 'the land of missing or vanishing girls', closing out other representations of the same field with less circumscribed notions.

UNFIXING THE FIELD

Bounded and 'sedimented' approaches to the field are becoming increasingly problematized through interventions by cultural, postcolonial and diaspora studies (Clifford 1997). Despite this, there has been an on-going resistance to the deconstruction of the lens of the researcher by a continuing focus on the importance of the 'field', where continuingly bounded perceptions and representations of culture appear (Narayan 1993). This is not to say that the act of demarcating a field is fundamentally a flawed exercise. The clarity that a 'universe' can provide to a researcher in attempting to chart out meaningful questions can often only be offered by the demarcation, however loosely or concisely it is drawn out. There are certain imperatives of thinking about methodology and the politics of research when constructing a field. However, the tools of ethnography and feminist research reflect various trajectories in terms of how different commentators locate their subjects as well as themselves. In this section, a number of authors and studies have been selected for discussion, not by any disciplinary boundaries, but as

a means of further developing the argument that the construction of the 'field' and the 'subject' contribute to the creation of knowledge on son preference. Much work on gender and son preference is increasingly using interdisciplinary means and methods, or at least showing an awareness of ideas and developments circulating in fields other than those they most immediately identify with. By embarking upon an examination of the threads of location and knowledge within a range of studies on gender in South Asia, I intend to pinpoint some questions around methodology and epistemology highlighted by these different studies to inform the formulation of research practices.

Studies charting out the political economy of son preference – i.e. socio-economic structures produced by capitalist production relations – offer insights into how material and social relations position women vis-à-vis power, men and the household. Bina Agarwal's (1994) work argues that a lack of access to assets, capital and resources is at the heart of women's disadvantaged position in India. Without rights to land or 'real' instead of nominal inheritance, preference for sons will continue to overshadow any positive perception of girl children as they will remain as economic appendages rather than economic agents, given dowries and out-marriage of women from their natal homes. Agarwal's concerns lie with the material base of gender relations around ownership as forming the basis for son preference, alongside other gender biases. One might argue that the voices of women and their agency within this sketch of women's material subjugation are absent from such an analysis, perhaps a common critique made of structuralist analysis more generally, while the political economy of gender relations is critically charted out and addressed by Agarwal through the legal and social frameworks she identifies and is therefore of seminal importance. However, the limitations of this approach is that the young women whose gender realities are being theorized find little agency within this – other than as recipients of structure.

Another approach – though bridging the frames and tools of political economy, Marxism and the ethnographic tradition of anthropology – is Ursula Sharma's (1980) seminal research on women's work in northwest India, focusing upon sites in Himachal Pradesh and Punjab. Utilizing a women-centred ethnographic method, she produced an in-depth analysis of kinship relations, marriage, access to household assets and resources. She combined the anthropological approach of long-term, intensive fieldwork with questions of political economy/Marxist feminism by viewing culture as something forming and constantly changing around the organization of production and reproduction. She showed how various codes of exchange and communication, despite some of the overarching barriers existent for women, also offered women both negotiation power and routes to fulfilment within the patriarchal household set-up. This study provided a view of women's autonomy and agency, even within patriarchal structures, and ultimately presented an alternative epistemological position to the more reductionist views of other studies. On this point alone, Sharma's work is most interesting for how she locates herself within the fieldwork experience:

> I first became interested in the social role of Indian women because, being married into an Indian family, I myself had to keep some of the conventions which Indian women observe when I was in India… Like many others, I was affected by the upsurge of feminist consciousness which led many Western women to question female roles in their own society. This reactivated my interest in the question of women's position in India… The daughter-in-law role has provided an excellent vantage point for Western women who have something to say about Indian society… Not that the daughters of the culture have been the silent subjects of research, (they) have, in different ways, interpreted the position and problems of Indian women to outsiders.

Her lack of loyalty to any sense of authenticity or position of the 'objective' anthropologist in the study, even during a time pre-dating the onslaught of post-structuralism and critiques of anthropology, is revealed in how she reflects upon the fieldwork experience as both a personal and an academic/intellectual one. Her position as a white, Western woman, married to a Punjabi man, having relatives in both localities in Himachal Pradesh and Punjab, offered her privy insight to the field. By offering readers this sense of her own location and position, she was reflexive about her positionality and spoke about her fieldwork data in far less authoritative tones than other ethnographic studies have done. The anthropologist's gaze of supposed 'knowing', distance and objectivity is given an alternative route by Sharma's study through certain assemblages of connection – such as feminism and the family.

Indeed, since the publication of Sharma's research mentioned here, feminist ethnography has developed as a methodological set of practices and approaches through such points of entry into making critical interventions into the 'field'. While experience-based information was revered early on by feminists as an important means of developing women-centred ethnographic approaches, it was not necessarily the *amount* of ethnographic fieldwork being done, but an expansion of the *types* of question being raised and addressed through the methods of ethnographic enquiry (Rosaldo 1989). Visveswaran's (1994) exploration of feminist ethnography addresses some of the epistemological issues of location I have referred to thus far. For her, ethnography is a medium of observation, scholarship, interpretation and representation, acting at once as 'fact' and 'fiction'. Her particular focus upon studies of culture by feminist anthropologists points to the representations of women of 'other' cultures as producing a comparative catalogue of women's oppression, albeit with variations of experience and difference. Visveswaran points to why the self-location of the ethnographer within the field is revealing of the possibilities and limits to 'doing' feminist ethnography. In defining routes toward developing feminist ethnographic approaches, she makes one point, which resonates with Sharma's work in her exploration of women-women relationships, in how it is not merely a matter of conducting women-centred research, or looking at women's relationships to men, but a matter of importance of examining women's relationships to other women, and the power relations and dynamics between them (1994: 20). Visveswaran goes on to argue that relationships between colonizer and

women and colonized and women need to be critically addressed during 'postcolonial times' both through the framing of the field experience through a questioning of ethnographic authority, 'knowing' and 'mastery' of the cultural context of the field.

Another example of anthropology's contributions to background understandings of gender in South Asia is the work of Roger and Patricia Jeffery. Spanning several decades of field-based research in the Bijnor District of Uttar Pradesh (UP), their contributions to understandings of gender (as intersecting and relational to religious identity, caste, education, fertility behaviour and childbirth) in North India has offered a longevity of consistent intensive research in a particular area. The longitudinal nature of their ethnographic work has offered a continuity, bringing insights into the complexities of gender relations through structures, conversations and observations of social and cultural process. While acknowledging the depth and significance of their work, I chart certain shifts within their locational field which highlight the responses to critical anthropology that ethnographic writing has made.

Where method of representation, through the use of field notes and diary, is one means by which ethnographers reflect upon their experiences, the diary also centres the gaze through the power of academic voice. The presentation of ethnographic evidence, then, is shone through the lens of the ethnographic mode of enquiry and investigation, represented through the snippets that are written-up of the field experience. Whereas Sharma locates herself in her study as a person having ties to the place and people and acknowledges her position as one which offered opportunities but which could possibly have compromised the study's approach, she makes it clear in the introduction and methodology about her commitments to the field in terms of relatedness, feminist politics and her academic interest in doing anthropological research, thus situating herself within her 'field'. In Jeffery, Jeffery and Lyon's 1989 book *Labour Pains and Labour Power*, their presence is at times unspoken and yet at others is omnipotent in their reflections upon childbirth and childbearing in Bijnor. The historical legacy of the anthropological tradition of Westerners researching 'others' in 'the field' could have been addressed in such accounts, without compromising the depth of their ethnographic work. While their intensive, longitudinal field-based research has been a tremendous asset to understandings of how state, culture and society interact at a local level, there are epistemological questions raised, for example, around doing participant observation during home childbirths, which would seem significant to the research's epistemological standpoint, obstacles and challenges.

By thinking through *what*, *why* and *how* the research is being carried out in the field, we begin to understand the role of the anthropologist researcher to be as much a catalyst as an observer or onlooker. An illustration of this comes from their reflections on interviews done around the question of son preference and family planning:

> No matter how useful a daughter is before she marries, her contributions are short-term, devalued because they are female labour and inadequate compensation for the

> expenses her parents subsequently face on her behalf. In the long run, her parents-in-law (not her parents) stand to gain from her work. (1989: 186)

The authority with which the burdensome perception of daughters is depicted, though certainly having significance in the South Asian context, not least in their own field site, comes to be read for general applicability without featuring voices of opposition within the analysis; despite appearing in the ethnographic data, voices of opposition tend to be left out or reframed as anomalies or individual cases. Thus, the 'non-preferred girls' are erected as the subject of the analytical discussion without having a space to speak assigned to them. However, it was only during that book's publication that critiques of such ethnographic work, mainly by postcolonial and subaltern studies, were raising questions around the types of knowledge they produced and the inability of the subaltern to 'speak' through the lens of academic scholarship. In Jeffery and Jeffrey's subsequent book *Don't Marry Me to a Plowman!* (1996), the reflections upon their ethnographic material presents a less omnipotent voice when they draw out a complex political economy and culture of gender and women's life course, laden with tensions and contradictions:

> whether a woman's children were boys or girls echoed through our fieldnotes. The themes elaborated in later chapters indicate why people placed so much store on having sons and greeted their arrival with celebration and giftgiving (which they sometimes found oppressive). By contrast, the response to a girl's birth was often ambivalent. Girls were loved and cherished, and they would become key players in kinship networks and life-cycle rituals – yet parents would readily admit to the costs and difficulties of having daughters.(39)

This extract poignantly highlights the complexities which exist within the exercise of writing up ethnographic fieldwork. The reader is given a more panoramic picture of son preference showing sensitivities to the inherent contradictions within people's desires and aspirations to have sons and the positioning of daughters as an essential yet fraught element to their lives and social networks. Here the locational field is informed by an acknowledgement of complexity rather than an unspoken assumption of authority within the ethnographic account. This offers the reader a view of the 'field' and the 'locational field' as two overlapping spheres which involve a "to-ing and fro-ing" of reflection and analysis rather than one fixed by author authority and the field of study. The ability to unfix one's position allows for other voices within the field to emerge, as highlighted in the expectations surrounding childbirth and childrearing.

Indeed, I am not exempt from this discussion of the politics of ethnography. I fully acknowledge that this book is written from my perspective and 'gaze', laden with my own notions of voice, locational field and authority. Yet, it is not the authority with which one represents the material that is of concern here. *What* is being said is perhaps less important here as much as *why*, *for whom* and *for what purposes* it is being told. Thus,

my concerns with epistemology also ask questions about reflexivity in an effort to break down the *knowing* position of the ethnographer in striving for transparency of the voice of the researcher. It is only by turning the lens back toward the researcher that the field can become more inclusive of activity and voices often not included.

VOICES IN THE FIELD

Indeed, the field itself is a construction, conceived in the gaze of the researcher. I have argued that within the literature on sex selection and son preference, the gaze of various disciplinary approaches and perspectives has geared our attentions toward an empiricist bias (i.e. a preoccupation with the hard 'facts' or 'evidence' of sex selection). My concerns are about looking at where discussions of son preference and sex selection are circulating and thus the types of knowledge that are being produced and what some of the outcomes of this might be. Which methods/tools are used in which contexts? But most importantly, are there certain silences which are intentionally or unintentionally created by the various approaches to sex selection and son preference?

Parallel to academic discourse is a more public discourse on son preference and sex selection in India which has seen a consensus, or even an orthodoxy, on the topic with phrases appearing like 'sex selection as a social crime', an 'anti-woman practice' or a 'social evil', with few public interventions (at least not openly) arguing in favour of sex selection. The public condemnation in media and academic writing has consolidated a highly uniform public discourse (led by feminists, civil society, journalists, medical practitioners). This was generated during the period up to the 1994 Pre-Natal Diagnostic Act, which made sex selection illegal in India. The build-up and lobbying around this time saw the public discourse overtaken by a condemnation of sex selection; meanwhile the previous discourses around son preference and sex selection retreated into the private – largely out of fear of the local and state government's policy to 'name and shame' perpetrators of female foeticide. Thus, popular attitudes and private practices may not have changed, giving a performative character to the circulation of public discourse on sex selection.

If we trace the consolidation of public, popular and private discourses in this way to the types of knowledge production on son preference and sex selection that are around, then the assumptions, standpoints and approaches of academic writings are critical in asking certain questions: where is the space for the voices of resistance and challenge from within civil society? Are these voices reduced to being merely viewed as futile voices in the patriarchal, son-preferring family unit? What tools enable us to overcome these intellectual constraints?

The epistemological problems that have been raised thus far have alerted us to how son preference has been created as a subject. This is not a new notion or method of enquiry by any means. Feminist ethnography and theory have been taking the problem of voice as a critical point from which to begin informing a research agenda. Viswesvaran

(1994) argues that feminist ethnographers can go even further in learning not only from women's speech, but also from women's silences. With the power of the lens of academic scholarship, the gaps or silences that occur within any given field can open up opportunities for quick-fix explanations that miss other possibilities. Rajan (1993: 10) alerts us to the importance of connecting the discursive with the 'lived' or 'ethnographic' experience: 'our understanding of the problems of "real" women cannot lie outside the "imagined" constructs in and through which "women emerge as subjects"'. She goes further in arguing for a continually reflexive and unfixed notion of the 'field' and the 'scholar' which operate dialectically, are influenced by one another's presence and ultimately undo the traditionally one-sided perspective of academic scholarship: 'Location, however, is not simply an address. One's affiliations are multiple, contingent and frequently contradictory', thus, questioning the authority of location of the 'gaze' of scholarship.

The silences within 'the field' of son preference, with particular reference to Punjab, can be read as equally significant to telling the story of son preference there. The public-private discourse has found men becoming increasingly less vocal within public discourses about son preference – whether they openly speak of their bias toward having sons or even the importance of sons or whether they are against sex-selective interventions. This in part could be explained by the commodification of sex selection which then saw the practice become illegalized, driving it even further underground and making it less easy to locate, with fewer people willing to speak. The spoken silences (the 'public' discourse which both men and women articulate openly but which are more performative and streamlined into acknowledging what is supposed to be said) are generating unheard voices (private discourses which circulate within families, relationships, conversations and discussions which tell what people are actually thinking and feeling about the subject – stories of women undergoing the scan, or men feeling pressure from parents to have a son and the subsequent reactions to this). Perhaps, it is the unheard voices offering varying, non-categorizing visions of son preference, some possibly going against the grain of the demographics of the sex ratio, which will allow for an epistemological shift not only in scholarship but also in action and public engagement which may ultimately break free of the 'gaze' that continues to see Punjab as the 'land of missing girls'.

NOTE

1. *Birthright*, the Tamil novel by Vaasanthi (translated by Vasantha Surya) is one example of an 'internal' engagement with son preference through the story of a female gynaecologist working in a small village in Tamil Nadu. The complexity of her working life as a doctor seeing cases of son preference and female foeticide, on the one hand, and her own status as an only child wanting to prove herself to her ageing father, raise a number of interesting insights into the challenges and reworkings of gender from the vantage point of medicalization, gender politics and situational circumstances.

2 SON PREFERENCE IN THE COLONIAL AND POSTCOLONIAL

In 1853 a meeting was held in Amritsar, soon after the annexation of Punjab by the British colonial force as part of its wider project of ensuring a culpable transition from the chaos that followed the fall of Maharaja Ranjit Singh's kingdom of Punjab**.** Led by Robert Montgomery,[1] Judicial Commissioner of Punjab, and Major H.B. Edwardes, then the deputy commissioner of Jalandhar, the aim of the meeting was to bring together the leading men of the dominant castes across the forty-six districts of Punjab in order to extend the influence of the British administration in bringing 'order' to the region. One of the central objectives of the 'Amritsar darbar'[2] was to ensure that this gathering of high status men 'signed up' to a pact which, among other things, committed them to report any member of their communities found to be practising female infanticide, a crime which would be punishable as a murder with the appropriate sentence. In the process, the meeting produced a register of rituals and customs of the various castes and tribes with a full record of wedding and dowry customs, including the types and amounts of expenditures made at weddings (Oldenburg 2002).

In a nutshell, the Amritsar darbar was an unprecedented gathering of high-ranking men from different castes, tribes and communities who, in attending the meeting and signing the declaration, symbolically succumbed to the agenda of British social control. The meeting, ironically held on the grounds of Amritsar jail and as part of the establishment of British administration in Punjab, was seen as an outright success in terms of the healthy attendance and cooperation of the male chiefs and noblemen (Major 2005; Oldenburg 2002). Female infanticide became officiated as a 'cultural crime'. It can be seen as a classic example of how the British colonial state presented its own skewed vision of Punjabi society by simultaneously utilizing caste and tribe in the summonsing only of 'men of standing', without any effort to ensure that even a single woman attended the meeting. As Major (2005: 101) notes, 'the whole anti-infanticide campaign in the Punjab was conducted by, and amongst, men. This is – to say the least – supremely ironic, given that infanticide was a "crime" carried out by and against females'. Even the form of the Amritsar meeting was that of a traditional *darbar*, or ceremonial court modelled on the Mughal and other princely court

formats. Hierarchies of status, precedence, etiquette and graded gifts and honours were part and parcel of the proceedings of the meeting, not to mention seating arrangements in accordance with stature. Thus, the outcome of this meeting and others to follow was to provide a list of infanticidal groups for the use of British administrative practices while simultaneously manipulating male caste and tribe power structures for this supposedly women-saving exercise. More significantly, perhaps, the top-down channelling of information and law from the administrative machinery to its chosen heads through such mandatory indoctrination of this time also lay the foundation for the culture of reprimand which has carried on in contemporary Punjab with regard to anti-foeticide campaigns.

It is not surprising, then, that colonial attempts to point out female infanticide would take little effect, apart from arguably heightening its profile, as was the case with *sati*, dowry and other social customs which were targeted in a similar fashion by colonial social policy during this time (Mani 1990; Major 2006). In the late 1970s, approximately 125 years later, Amritsar would yet again become a place of significance within public discussions of son preference. It was the place where the first ultrasound clinic opened in Punjab and from where the mushrooming of such clinics across the region would spread for two decades to come. Despite the Pre-Natal Diagnostic Act being passed by the Indian parliament in 1994 which made sex-selective scanning officially illegal, it was not adopted in Punjab until 1997. Any attempts to show implementation of the act were delayed by lack of political will to do so and were further supported by a Supreme Court public litigation which stated that schemes to educate doctors, dais and other health personnel first had to be devised before it could be taken into effect and anyone could be held punishable. What emerged out of this period was a public discourse on female foeticide which was rooted within the male-dominated public health and public policy agencies, much reminiscent of the bureaucratic elitism and state paternalism which the colonial officials in Punjab had so meticulously designed a hundred years earlier. 'Naming and shaming' of individuals and doctors for practising female foeticide and the compilation of lists of clinics which continued to operate without regulation reflected an approach of disciplining the public through mandates and declarations from the bird's-eye view of state authority.

In May 2005, the deputy Commissioner of a district near Jalandhar, Nawanshahr, launched a multi-tiered programme of fact-finding, data analysis and interventionist outreach work on a scale unseen before anywhere in Punjab or India. The deputy Commissioner was single-handedly given credit for showing such precision at tackling the 'social menace' of female foeticide by addressing it head-on through advanced computerized systems of knowledge which were used to scare people from undergoing sex-selective abortions.

This was not a new discourse on son preference. Public health officials across the state of Punjab, under the various campaigns to 'save the girl child', had over the years been given licence to make statements of analysis of the dangers of female foeticide,

as the state and national government did its part in battling the 'social evil' of female foeticide by encouraging public denouncements of female foeticide as a way of showing its support of the Pre-Natal Diagnostic Test Act, despite the rampant critiques of a lack of monitoring or implementation. For instance, in 1999 the Director of Health and Family Welfare in Punjab made an appeal to the public to cooperate with the authorities and warned that if the Act was not implemented with vigilance, the social imbalance would lead to an increase in crimes like rape and in the problem for young men to get married (*Indian Express* 1999). Such projections of the dangers of female foeticide to Punjab's (male) sustenance have merely continued the legacy of revolving the public discussions around 'men of standing', thus, unsurprisingly, producing a knowledge and discourse of son preference, unable to engage with contemporary cultural thought, with social change or with the disparate yet vocal (women's and men's) voices of opposition to son preference and female foeticide from a range of different perspectives.

How different from one another are these vignettes taken of 1853 and 2005 Punjab? The temporality of discourses of son preference alerts us to the need to look critically to the *then* and the *now*, having both the hindsight of the historical record as well as the analytical tools provided by postcolonial theory. Hall's (1996) exploration of the postcolonial question 'when was the postcolonial?' shows the conceptual reasoning required when drawing ties and threads between different events, historical periods and places for which an end to colonial domination is not necessary for the 'post' in the postcolonial to take effect. Colonial discourse runs through the transmission of ideas which reflect an ideological attachment to the power structures and relations which supported and continue to support Western hegemony in terms of knowledge, power, history and location. For our purposes here, this chapter aims to bring to light the continuities as well as departures which run through the colonial and postcolonial representations and discourses of son preference. The inexorable authority with which anti-infanticide and anti-foeticide proclamations were made by both the British colonial administration in the nineteenth century and by the Punjab government in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries show common strategies of disciplining culture through edicts, penalties and blacklisting. Perhaps most striking is the embodiment of 'son preference' which both colonial and postcolonial engagements have shown in their inability to speak to the daughters or to hear their voices or concerns. By considering the politics of the looking glass, I attempt to highlight the manner in which official recognitions of the 'social evil' of son preference have resulted in a repertoire of official transmissions which show an adherence to certain hegemonic, masculinist and paternalistic notions across colonial and postcolonial Punjab. The rich and critical historiographies of the British colonial state's engagement with female infanticide during the mid-nineteenth century offered by Malhotra (2002), Oldenburg (2002), Sen (2002), and Bhatnagar et al. (2005) provide the base of the historical discussion in the chapter, while a range of examples taken from contemporary Punjab are used to augment the postcolonial frame of son preference.

DISCIPLINING THE NATIVES

The British colonial engagement with gender in South Asia mirrors its strategic approach toward the management of social control and authority in the region. While the public domain was being colonized through the usurpation of formal political power, the private domain was being scrutinized and studied by the eyes of the colonial regime. Cultural practices of the *natives* became labelled as barbaric, savage and anti-woman by the colonial state which sought to erect its authority on the premise of its own sense of its civilized cultural and moral superiority which went beyond public political sovereignty over territory. The British colonial ambitions were to project its power and influence over both public and private domains. Grewal (1996) explores how the domestic world became exoticized by the colonial observer, who found its inaccessibility to the eyes of the white Westerner both a frustration while also a justification for the colonial venture. Hence, the *zenana* became characterized as an opaque space understood by colonial observers to be diametrically opposed to the transparency of the normative Victorian household and thus in need of reform and rescue (Sen 2002).

Reform of the private sphere entailed the scrutinizing of custom and tradition by the colonial state which saw its role and position as one of rational authority. The 'civilizing mission' as it came to be known, charted out the British colonial state's experimentation and enactment of enlightenment thinking of the time.[3] John Stuart Mill became one of the most influential thinkers of liberal imperialism in the nineteenth century. Having worked as a life-long employee of the British East India Company in India, Mill offered moral and theoretical justification for imperial domination by identifying the imperatives facing 'civilized' societies such as Britain to improve, discipline and modernize societies such as India which were viewed as backward and barbaric.[4] By warning against potential misuse of colonial power due to governing officials not being familiar with the languages, customs and contexts of the people they were overseeing, Mill (1861) set out a schema for good governance by seeking to improve British knowledge and understanding of the 'native' populations they ruled over. He called for the selection and training of a specialized cadre of colonial officers who would acquire skills and relevant knowledge about local customs and culture. These officers would be employees of the government and would be, as Mill saw, free from the economically exploitative activities that other colonists were engaged in.

For Mill, the policy context of the civilizing mission offered a view to eventual self-governance, an aim which on the surface provided the ultimate justification for British rule in India. As Grewal (1996) notes, most English suffragettes joined in the civilizing mission as 'the division of the world into "civilized" and "uncivilized" regions, in which the latter have to be settled and "tamed" by Englishmen, was part of the habitus of the suffragists'. These feminist orientalists, who were engaged in the suffragette movement in Britain while being supporters of empire through the civilizing mission, had surprisingly little to say about son preference. While purdah was a recurring theme of observation

in the travel diaries of English women in colonial India and other parts of the empire in South Asia and the Middle East, son preference remained a male-to-male identification of British administrators and 'native' men of the respective castes and tribes. It existed beneath the surface of penetration by the watchful eyes of these English women.

Authority and knowledge became the pillars of colonial domination by addressing the parliamentary critics of colonialism who saw it as nothing more than sheer economic exploitation. Mill's design of the civilizing mission filled a gap within liberal imperial thought of the nineteenth century and was the foundation behind the next phase of empire, giving it a new lease of life not only in South Asia but also in other parts of Britain's growing empire in Africa and Asia. Erstwhile having formulated its purpose in India around the imperial objectives of economic exploitation, the liberal imperial position of civilizing the natives around such issues as female infanticide became an integral part of colonial social policy and authority. The contradictory impacts that this had upon Indian society were enormous in terms of the moral messages of colonial 'right' being circulated at the time and the material realities of conflict, deprivation and unequal access to institutions by various groups living under imperial rule (Mani 1990).

The civilizing mission was extended beyond a mere moral justification. It became the driving force behind the generation of a particular form of knowledge about India and of Britain itself as the imperial centre (Cohn 1996). This was symbolic in that it reflected the colonial state's interest in the social and cultural realm insofar as it provided mileage for showing its moral duty and function in India. Thus, the records of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries reflect the concerted effort on the part of the British colonial state in India to assert its authority over the moral codes and practices of that time. The 1881 census was the first census to be collected in such a systematic, coordinated fashion across the various princely states and provinces. However, as the sex ratio appeared for the first time in 1881 in the census, the social reform efforts of British colonial policy were seeking to highlight and make minor interventions into social customs rather than making dramatic changes (Malhotra 2002: 61). This became the tacit approach toward female infanticide. However, female infanticide's currency within colonial policy must also be put into context, as it did not stand apart from other agendas for understanding and controlling the 'native' population. Colonial measures for dealing with potential threat of non-cooperation and rebellion, namely by the urban higher castes, was dealt with by the imperial theorization of culture through high caste practices around hypergamy and dowry. However, as Oldenburg (2002) points out, the astute selection and naming of certain castes as infanticidal while a simultaneous 'blind-eye' was being turned toward the practice of female infanticide among many tribes of jats (rural landowning castes) is an illustration of the political mileage that caste (in this instance, through the anti-infanticide campaign) provided to the imperial objective of penetrating and manipulating existing social relations within Punjab.

One noticeable trend in colonial reportage on infanticide of the nineteenth to early twentieth centuries is the manner in which caste is used as one of *the* primary categories

of analysis. Caste became the social institution through which the colonial state could differentiate itself from the 'traditional' societies it was ruling over and thus proceeded to 'invent' new forms of caste relations and structures alongside its development of the colonial administration (Dirks 1989; Cohn 1987). Susan Bayly (2001) notes how the all-India census was the instrument by which caste was given not only meaning, but hierarchical locations of enumeration, rank and status to the various social groupings mentioned in its content, all to be utilized for colonial purposes.[5] *Native* practices such as female infanticide were linked to particular caste and *goth* groupings by the colonial reports, each caste having its own rationale for committing infanticide. Caste became so much engrained as a mode of understanding female infanticide that, as Vishwanath notes, 'the 1921 census report classifies castes into two categories, namely, castes having "a tradition" of female infanticide and castes without such a tradition'.

Being classified as an 'infanticidal caste' depended on two factors. The first was how the British understood the local reputation of the caste grouping. The second was the evidence provided by the census in terms of the sex ratio (Sen 2002). The 'discovery' of female infanticide among certain caste groups in the United Provinces, the North West Provinces, Punjab and Oudh was seen as a sort of revelation about the dominant groups with whom the colonial state had been dealing in various capacities. The political mileage that could be had from certain types of 'information' about caste and gender was heartily availed by the colonial authorities. Colonial knowledge thus was not only a projection of an imperial illusion of 'knowing' the colonized (Cohn 1987), but became one which coterminously impacted upon how colonial subjects began to view themselves vis-à-vis colonial state authority, its judgement of the 'natives' and emerging counter-nationalist sentiments (Chatterjee 1993). However, the performance of the cooperation by both British and Punjabi 'men of standing' in the outlawing of female infanticide by means of regulating and curbing wedding expenditure was one which was of capitulation to authority rather than out of a deep-rooted acknowledgement of the need for change from within. As Oldenburg notes with regard to agreements signed by the various representatives of different clans and castes:

> From the Bedis of Dera Baba Nanak, the Rajput princes of Kangra and other hill districts, and the Khatris and Brahmins of a dozen districts in joint agreements with the urban and rural Muslims of Lahore – suggest that no community tried to refute the blanket accusation that wedding expenses and dowry were among the chief cause of infanticide. Rather, they promised to respect the new sumptuary regulations they had expressly gathered to draw up.

Thus, as the records of female infanticide show us, the dominant castes who were the ones 'picked out' or 'picked upon' were the castes as Vishwanath (2004) characterizes as hypergamous and doing their best to avoid jeopardizing their relatively elevated status through dowry. However, this depiction of high caste, hypergamy leaves many gaps

Table 2.1 Sex Ratios of Castes in North India, 1921

		Number of Females per 1,000 Males		
Caste	*Category*	*1901*	*1911*	*1921*
Punjab				
Jat (Hindu)[6]	A	795	774	789
Khutri	A	808	802	811
Rajput (Hindu)	A	822	756	796
Gujar	A	799	763	778
Jat (Muslim)	B	859	807	820
Rajput (Muslim)	B	883	841	864
Chamar	B	871	836	845
Kanet	B	924	947	936
Arain	B	877	807	830
United Provinces				
Jat (Hindu)	A	852	769	763
Rajput (Hindu)	A	887	873	877
Gujar	A	802	755	785
Brahmin	B	923	899	895
Chamar	B	986	958	960
Kumhar	B	931	941	931
Kurmi	B	970	929	909
Rajputana				
Rajput (Hindu)	A	794	778	722
Jat (Hindu)	A	830	851	840
Gujar	A	834	846	837
Brahmin	B	925	937	920
Dhobi	B	916	962	922
Teli	B	908	930	941
Lodha	B	911	916	895

Source: *Census of India (Report), 1921*, Vol. 1, Appendix VI, cited in Vishwanath (2004: 2314).

A = Castes with 'a tradition' of female infanticide

B = Castes without a tradition of female infanticide

in the knowledge of son preference of that time, not only as an explanation of how high caste identities became formulated around female infanticide during this period through the pressures of colonial modernity, but significantly around the question of women's positionality and agency, not least absence, within public discourses on female infanticide.

COLONIAL 'DISCOVERIES'

An official record resembling a data bank of empirical evidence and descriptive details of native practices was required before the colonial administration could begin its civilizing mission.The 'discovery', codification and categorization exercise began as early as the late eighteenth century with the diaries and records of East India officers and colonial administrators. Various aspects of *native* culture, caste and kinship patterns and custom were included in this emerging record. Cultural practices such as widow immolation, dowry and bride-burning, as well as female infanticide, became issues for focus to highlight the will of British imperial social policy of the nineteenth century to discipline backward native customs. Bhatnagar et al. (2005) poignantly characterize the trope of discovery between 1789 and 1870 of official dispatches about female infanticide as the post-Enlightenment administrative travelogue. By giving a label to the official record as a travelogue, Bhatnagar et al. put into context the written conventions by which administrators abided in how they wrote about their object of study, the criminal(ized) act of killing young baby girls at birth by landed castes and tribes in northwest India (2005: 39). Thus, the repetition within the reportage of the seemingly endless discoveries of female infanticide can be seen in light of the Orientalist lens through which these British officers viewed Indian society through caste and gender.

The shifts in wider imperial motives in India can be largely read through the changes to the colonial conceptualization of female infanticide (Sen 2002). One of the first 'discoveries' of female infanticide in colonial India occurred in 1789 in Varanasi (Benares) by Jonathan Duncan, the British resident there at the time. The 'discovery' occurred when Duncan was travelling around the district to collect and settle revenues. What Duncan found in the process was that among a Rajput community in the district there were no sons-in-law because, as was revealed in his interviews, there were no daughters due to the extensive and historical practice of female infanticide among that community (Vishwanath 2004). Similar 'discoveries', as discussed in Chapter 1, were made in other localities and with other identified caste groups.

Colonial policy of the time could be characterized as a fine balance between 'naming and shaming' caste communities while simultaneously creating a model of high-caste culture (in naming these groups) which other groups could aspire to (Malhotra 2002). Thus, far from achieving any egalitarian goals, the colonial codification and banning of female infanticide resulted in little more than an affirmation of both caste hierarchies and a culture of preferring sons to daughters. Official overtures of imperial concern about women's status in Punjab were expressed through a sense of cultural and political superiority of British power through different statements and proclamations. In 1853 the judicial commissioner of Punjab, R. Montgomery, wrote the *Minute on Infanticide* in which he stated the 'facts' coming out of reports sent to him from his commissioners of the various divisions of Punjab. Two years before, Montgomery had requested that each of the commissioners of Punjab investigate the 'crime' (before it

had been formally made an illegal act) of infanticide in their own districts to ascertain its prevalence in the region. This 'fact-finding' mission resulted in the compilation of findings about the concentration of the practice within certain groups. The tools at hand to analyse infanticide were by this time well developed, with formats of evidence collection, causal analysis and report writing readily available. As Oldenburg (2002: 49) comments on the infanticide reports prepared by this troop of 'amateur politician-scholar-bureaucrats':

> By the time Montgomery requested his district commissioners to prepare reports on the prevalence of female infanticide in the Punjab in 1851, the business of investigating and reporting on the subject was already a fine art, with models to replicate. Although differences were noted in separate regions, the discernible structure and intertextuality of the infanticide reports created a distinct genre.

It is no coincidence then that the genre of colonial reportage on female infanticide parallels that of the reportage on widow immolation and dowry. It is the utility of the findings of infanticide that points us toward the objectives of this genre of report writing. The findings reflect commentaries about various caste groups who are seen as potential or already existing allies or adversaries of the colonial state. The classifications of caste, religion, tribe and locality were ready-made categories for such analyses and provided the socio-political backdrop to policy decisions. Thus, colonial reporting was by no means an objective, blandly bureaucratic process nor was it an exclusively mechanical exercise of the record-taking state machinery. Despite such reports being produced in written document form which was largely incomprehensible to most Indians apart from the English-educated bureaucratic elite, they circulated through a range of different conduits, not least the Amritsar darbar and other communications that discursively passed through existing social structures. In this way, the reports acted as a catalyst for encouraging people to view themselves in new and different ways. However, an important point to make here is that, just as all administrations have their own complexities, the British colonial state was not a monolithic entity. While the reportage on infanticide and other issues pertaining directly to women in colonial Punjab exhibit an identifiable trend toward the labelling and naming of communities for wider objectives of gaining imperial advantage in the region, there certainly must have been some officers who, in their tasks of interviewing and writing reports, would have felt that they were working toward a goal of social justice, in whatever form.

Noticeable in the observations and perceptions of the administrators communicated in their diaries and reports is a watchful eye cast upon the *native* male and his treatment of *native* women. The colonial state took on a paternalistic, even patronizing, role toward Indian women under the British Raj, though without ever speaking directly to them. Without any intention to actively involve Indian women, whether in Punjab, United Provinces or other provinces, colonial discourse on female infanticide was one which

explicitly excluded the perspectives and perceptions of women about their gendered worlds. However, the exclusion of women from considerations of policy outcomes was not only restricted to female infanticide.

The colonial project's focus upon custom in making court rulings was established in the latter part of the nineteenth century. Gilmartin (1981) traces how customary law was used to justify the British colonial state's support of Punjabi kinship systems and land claims, which was done through the exclusion of women from rights to land. The Alienation of Land Act of 1900 was a conscious policy instrument to align British interests with the protection of 'tribal' custom (ibid.) by ensuring that the landed interests of agricultural 'tribes' maintained hegemony meanwhile subordinating women's interests to this cause. This could be one explanation for the 'blind-eye' turned toward female infanticide among jats in Punjab.

However, as Ali (1988) point out, the land alienation act was introduced in Punjab as a means of protecting from indebtedness cultivating groups who had served in the army, exhibiting a simultaneous encouragement and patronage of these groups while also continuing its compulsion to label and categorize the social practices of these groups. The indebtedness of the peasantry in the late nineteenth century was forcing these peasant cultivators to mortgage their land or sell it to moneylenders, presenting a threat to the feudal economy (Singh 1994: 29). Peasant cultivators of Punjab were predominantly Sikhs and Muslims, though in eastern Punjab (which now constitutes the state of Haryana in India) there were also Hindus among this group. Moneylenders across Punjab were predominantly Hindus of the *khatri* caste, and this was cause for the British colonial state to intervene in order to maintain the balance of the feudal economy for continuing productivity and for maintaining 'order' (Singh 2008). This contributed to not only sharpening internal religious divisions among Punjabis but also growing grievances among them against British rule, though for different reasons. The British government was worried that the unrest among the Sikh and the Muslim peasants could spread to the army and, therefore, passed the Land Alienation Act of 1900 which prohibited land sale to what the Act classified as 'non-agricultural castes'. The Punjabi Hindus perceived this Act as a discriminatory policy aimed against them and, therefore, became more active supporters of the Indian nationalist movement led by the Indian National Congress party (Robinson 1987). All three main religious communities of Punjab harboured economic resentment, though not for the same reasons, against the policies of the British rule. This showed the complexities of the colonial state's approach toward those groups it identified as potential allies (ibid.: 29).

Concurrent with this, the colonial state was busy banning other 'cultural' practices such as sati and female infanticide, highlighted as symbolic of 'anti-woman' Indian cultural values which needed reform through the state's accumulation of knowledge and a nominal level of intervention. Thus, female infanticide and the girl child in India became targets of colonial social reform which offered both justification for continued imperial presence in the region (with its economic and political objectives), meanwhile

presenting a welfare approach to the women's cause (with its objectives of maintaining stability through social control). How and why had female infanticide become such a pressing issue by the middle of the nineteenth century when the colonial government of India passed the Act for the Prevention of Female Infanticide? Particularly as the initial revelations of female infanticide by colonial observers occurred as early as the 1780s, no formal action was taken until nearly a century later and even then it was done through written rather than punitive measures. British colonial state in Punjab collected information on female infanticide out of its quest for knowledge about the 'natives', however, only acting as and when the requirements of political expediency could utilize an expression or performance of sovereignty.

By the mid-nineteenth century, a catalogue of infanticidal castes and tribes had been compiled in which criminal infanticidal tribes were each named, labelled and categorized. In particular, the *Rajputs*, *Jats* and *Bedi*s in Punjab found their prominent place in the mounting catalogue of such criminal tribes. These were, by-and-large, landowning castes who in protecting their landed interests were understood as having a culture of viewing daughters as liabilities to their consolidation of economic influence while also having certain conventions around not marrying daughters to families of lower caste status.[7] However, the practice of infanticide was by no means absolute within these castes nor identifiable in any systematic fashion to an outside observer. Through the district gazetteers and other reports, pockets of intensity of son preference became suddenly juxtaposed upon the national frame of caste, tribe and culture.

Perhaps more intriguing than the actual 'discovery' by the British of female infanticide within these castes is how these particular groups featured within the wider colonial schema over time. In Punjab as in other parts of India, the daughters of dominant caste groups were particularly highlighted as victims of oppressive cultural patterns set out by marriage custom and group identity. However, alongside this, taxation of rural areas was one crucial area for maintaining colonial authority which required the cooperation and coalescence of the rural landed castes. Zamindars, Jats and other landed groups became strategic vehicles for the penetration of the colonial economy into the rural countryside, and as such, were studied, documented and characterized in great detail and definition. The personal reflections of the colonial diarists about these groups were officiated by being published and bound into the format of the gazetteer which was comprehensible to the colonial agenda while also offering empirical examples and explanations for various phenomena. One example is in the characterization of the Kharral tribe in Montgomery (present-day Sahiwal in Pakistan) as the backdrop for explaining a historical tendency toward son preference:

> The Kharrals are the most northerly of the great Ravi tribes, occupying a great portion of the land between Gugera and the Lahore district on both sides of the river, and extending some distance into the Gujranwala district. The Kharrals were Rajputs … and never got on with each other. The feuds of the Lakheras and upper Ravi Kharrals

> have been noticed. The tragic adventure of Mirza and Sahiban is said to have been the cause of desperate quarrels. Mirza was a Kharral of the Sahi *muhin* … went as a boy to Khewa in Jhang, where he fell in love with his cousin Sahiban, the daughter of the chief man of the place. Her parents betrothed her to a youth of the Chadhar tribe, but before the marriage could take place, Mirza ran away with her. He was pursued and slain. Her relations strangled Sahiban… These murders were the cause of such bloody feuds between the clans that it at length was thought inauspicious to have daughters, and as soon as they were born, they were strangled as Sahiban had been. This custom of female infanticide was common among the Kharrals till Colonel Hamilton, Commissioner of Multan, persuaded them to discontinue it. (*Gazetteer of the Montgomery District* 1884: 62–3)

The method of analysis is worth noting in this excerpt. The reliance upon folklore in explaining the practice of female infanticide among the Kharrals of Montgomery accompanied by colonial, orientalist judgement reflects the mode of travel writing which presents the perspective of the report as that of an omnipotent observer. The tragic story of Mirza Sahiban, which, among other love tragedies such as Heer Ranjha and Sassi Punnu, circulates around Punjab even today, and in this account is uncritically offered as the source of the practice of female infanticide. The potential betrayal that a daughter can later present to the 'clan' is avoided by the strangling of the newborn daughter at birth. The story of Mirza Sahiban, told in this way, is devoid of any wider socio-economic processes which may have shaped the 'story' of female infanticide in this context and also fails to present a picture of the community of Kharrals outside of a patriarchal, masculine frame. However, it is not surprising that the patriarchal tribe remained the unit of analysis for such colonial reports, given that these were the structures that the British colonial administrators were manipulating and collaborating with.

The shifting interests of the colonial state were reflected in how it continued to alter its tactics and approach toward different groups over time. While it has been contended that jats and other rural landed groups were largely overlooked within the naming of infanticidal castes, in the process of being groomed as the colonial state's collaborators in post-1857 Punjab (Oldenburg 2002), this is *not* to say that these cultivating groups were not targeted by the reportage on infanticide. In the nineteenth century, this information was not of utility, though later on it would become more useful as different groups began to serve different purposes. The maintenance of social control while ensuring the productivity of the colonial feudal economy were two aims of the British colonizing force which saw the development of a complex, changing and often contradictory approach of the colonial state in Punjab. As land alienation became one issue of importance to make a show of British alignment with the interests of the peasantry, the urban higher castes – namely Khatris and Brahmins – became the explicit target of the anti-infanticide campaign. These groups became the focus of the 'civilizing mission' and its objectives of justifying the moral high ground that the occupying colonial force

needed to support its self-perception of cultural superiority. However, this did not go unnoticed by the competing masculinities of these higher caste groups. Equipped with the tools of language and expression through print media, the urban higher castes were able to resurrect notions of caste belonging and identity which placed women at the centre of idealized notions of high-caste practices and norms. Domestic ideologies of women's humility, duty, household roles and responsibilities and religious practices became the focal point for the Singh Sabha and Arya Samaj social reform movements which operated among the high-caste Sikhs and Hindus and middle classes of the early twentieth century (Malhotra 2005: 1). However, these reform movements, despite attempting to create alternative urban middle-class modernities, could not compete or challenge the institutional hegemony that colonialism imposed through education and the bureaucracy. The jobs and opportunities for the higher-caste, urban middle classes to achieve mobility in Punjab ultimately converged with colonial modernity while continuing to be in conflict with it throughout the independence movement.

POSTCOLONIAL IDENTIFICATIONS AND INTERVENTIONS

In order to push the discussion of son preference toward the limits of its postcoloniality, we might ask *what do acts against female infanticide or foeticide represent which fail to challenge and/or which operate from within the very structures of caste and masculinist power which sustain it*? The colonial discourse on female infanticide shows the reliance upon the records of 'objective' reporting, categorization and naming of infanticidal castes, and legal framing of its criminality from the utilitarian view of the colonial administrative apparatus. The anti-infanticide campaigns during British colonial rule in Punjab show the morally driven and invasive approach that colonial administrators took through the public meetings convened by the British in asserting its authority while also appearing as the promoter of social justice (Major 2005). The simultaneous collusion of 'men of standing' at such meetings as the Amritsar darbar and their criminalization through the setting up of a knowledge bank and legal frameworks around cultural practices like female infanticide exhibit the manner in which colonized masculinities were symbolically used. At the same time, the absence of Punjabi women from these public discussions and events also shows how symbiotically Punjabi masculinity was being tamed while also being enhanced as Punjabi women were out of sight, tucked away firmly within the male-headed household which the colonial state so carefully ensured remained the unit of social organization to ease its own functioning.

The postcolonial frame of son preference offers us a vast landscape for examining the continuities between colonial and postcolonial discourses on son preference in Punjab. Postcolonial moments and acts are those which exhibit a connection with the power structures of state authority, conceptual notions of the 'native' or the 'other', and a range

of other continuities from colonial domination which postcolonial times maintain. As discussed in Chapter 1, representations and knowledges of son preference have continued to exhibit a relentless trope of Orientalism in various forms which has continued to analyse women's experiences through the lens of culture and tradition. The postcolonial lens enables a critical examination of the impacts that the colonial intrusion had upon the Punjabi household and wider society in historical and contemporary time and space.[8] First, it generated an oppositional binary structure in the manner in which the 'native' and (British) colonial subject were seen as different from one other along essentialist lines. The 'native' becomes barbaric, uncivilized and misogynist while the *angrez* (English) colonizer takes the position of civilizer, harbinger of justice and saviour of women. The binary oppositional structures of oriental and Westerner and of colonizer and colonized allowed for the 'white man's burden'[9] to become a mission for social intervention by the colonial state which utilized the knowledge of cultural imperialism for its wider aims of economic and political domination (Said 1979). While colonialism attempted to fix and objectify these distinctions and demarcations of racialized subjectivity, postcolonialism analyses these frames of power and knowledge across and beyond the binaries as a means of conceptualizing an anti-colonial subjectivity. This counter-subjectivity provides a route by which colonial authority can be disrupted, remade into 'hybridized' forms and challenged by a postcolonial sense of 'agency' (Bhabha 2004).

The colonial state, however, played a central role in manipulating the production of knowledge of 'native' societies and thus cannot merely be dismissed as something of the past. As Kaviraj (2003) points out, the state was a key actor in the formation of non-Western modernity, and colonialism must therefore be understood within any analysis of the postcolonial state. Its legacies in the plethora of postcolonial contexts live on in a range of different spheres. The nature of the postcolonial state has been much debated in terms of its historicity and characterization. The previously upheld notion that states in Africa and Asia lacked history or indigenous cultures of democracy as a means for explaining authoritarian statist expressions has been largely discredited by critical colonial historiography (Bayart 1993). Mamdani (1996) and Mbembe (2001) have looked at the manner in which the state was not merely an externally imposed structure but became immediately re-appropriated by the colonized and facilitated the formation of new forms of 'indigenous' rule and resistance as much framed by the postcolonial state as by the local material and political cultures it governs. The bureaucratic and administrative practices of the colonial and postcolonial state are expressions of its intentions to give a formal institutionalized understanding of social order and political authority. The state in postcolonial India projects this type of consciousness through its circulation of pronouncements, acts, development and education programmes and other social schemes in making a show of its role and function to intervene and to discipline disorder.[10] The sex ratio, as an expression of state knowledge and power, is one of the tools used to exert this authority.

Table 2.2 Sex Ratio* in States of India

States/Territories	*2001 Rural*	*2001 Urban*	*2001 Total*	*1991 Total*	*Increase/ Decrease*
Punjab	799	796	798	875	–77
Haryana	823	808	819	879	–60
U.P.	921	890	916	927	–11
Kerala	961	958	960	958	2
Tamil Nadu	933	955	942	948	–6
Gujerat	906	837	883	928	–45

Source: *Census of India 2001*.

* Number of girls to every 1,000 boys aged 0–6.

The ability to compare and contrast national data as well as inter-state data is enabled by the availability of figures which become viewed as official, factual information about the populations which they represent. The state is at once both the source of knowledge and the agent of policy. The Nehruvian discourse of the welfare state gave the postcolonial state in India a sustainable lease of life in this respect through its self-perception as the authoritative voice on the public good (Corbridge and Harris 2000).

Despite the liberalization of the Indian economy in 1991 and other subsequent reforms to state-led development and welfare activities, contemporary state discourses on development and 'women's issues' show many continuities from the 'mixed economy' era, not least of its paternalistic approach. If we adopt the conceptualized notion of the postcolonial state as an institution which mobilizes its resources to serve the interests of its national elites whose ascendance to hegemony can be traced to the colonial enterprise, then our reading of son preference in the postcolonial has much to say about the nature of public discourses on female foeticide and son preference. The purpose of the colonial state was to control subordinated societies in serving the colonizer's interest of order and wealth accumulation, while the knowledge generated by the colonial administrators was done so with this aim in mind. Similarly, the purpose of the postcolonial state has been to maintain order along a trajectory of national development, while the knowledge and actions generated by the postcolonial state follows this as its directing principle. Thus, the repetitive series and often contradictory messages through discourses and images can be seen in the diaries and reports of the administrators *and* exhibited in contemporary representations of son preference and female foeticide. The official discourse on son preference shows a reified position of a paternal colonial and postcolonial state which has held the power of manipulating public and official knowledge and discourse through its documents, legal jurisdiction and campaigns. However, in the case of Pakistan which is home to the largest portion of the region of Punjab, state policy is less concerned with

Table 2.3 Sex Ratio in Provinces of Pakistan

Pakistan	*Rural*	*Urban*	*Difference*
Punjab	93.65	89.15	4.50
Sindh	94.45	90.69	3.76
NWFP	95.94	88.25	7.69
Balochistan	88.07	84.68	3.39

Source: *Census of Pakistan* (1998); Population Census Organization cited in Punjab Lok Sujag (2005) *Missing Millions: Sex Ratio Differences in Pakistan*, Lahore: p. 14.

gender differentials in its discursive projections of public good and leaves this work to the non-governmental sector which seek patronage from international aid agencies and other such funding streams.

Punjab on both sides of the India-Pakistan border is highlighted by such data in terms of gender biases, life expectancy and a litany of other features of Punjabi culture and society which show it to be a place where men's and women's life courses represent differential realities. A more concerted effort to analyse Punjab in its composite and comparative dimensions is much needed in future analysis of gender in the region.

One of the results of the circulatory sets of arguments and debates on son preference has been an inability to break out of the grips of colonial discourse and to move above and beyond the colonial lens of 'native' culture and victimized women. Since the early 1990s, when the sex ratio was being highlighted as being at an alarming level, state advertisements began to be released showing a public recognition of the demographic trends which were resulting in the 'missing women' of Punjab and other states in India. Both government and non-governmental organizations, often in coordination with one another, have been active in making sure that anti-foeticide remains in the public eye as the demographic trends continue to deteriorate against female enumeration. The Chandigarh-based Institute for Development and Communication (IDC) has been prolifically producing reports and research documents on various aspects of gender violence in Punjab (e.g. Dagar 2001, 2002). The IDC has conducted numerous surveys to gauge public opinion and social trends on topics such as rape, divorce, desire for male children and awareness of methods for sex selection, among a range of other questions on gender and social inequity in Punjab. In this sense, the documented evidence on female foeticide in Punjab has been made available to the public and the media in a form which feeds back popular opinion to the newspaper readership and wider public. As such, this goes beyond the 'discovery' and 'naming and shaming' tactics earlier discussed. However, the IDC reports present other looming questions around sampling and research methodologies which are largely deductive rather than inductive – that is, that the answers to the question are already known (i.e. after 'identifying' female foeticide, it can be 'controlled'). Thus, the deductive reasoning used presents justification for

intervention through sample survey techniques and hand-picked illustrative case studies. These issues around approach and methodology may be a reflection of the funding streams which restrain the format of dissemination, particularly when research funding has been funnelled through international and government agencies requiring snapshot research reports with conclusive findings and recommendations for intervention. However, this is not to say that NGOs in Punjab are unable to act out of free will. In 2006 a Punjab-based NGO, Voluntary Health Association of Punjab (VHAP), filed a public litigation to the Supreme Court of India stating that sex-selective abortion of female foetuses was continuing to increase despite its banning by the PNDT Act. This came soon after a well was discovered in the residence of a practising doctor who had been carrying on covertly providing unmonitored scans and abortions even after the act had come into effect in 1994. VHAP argued in its litigation, just as other medical activists had been arguing, that the legal stipulation was not enough to impart change. The implementation of the law was lacking, and the litigation called for a closer, more diligent monitoring of the PNDT Act.

However, as Bracken and Nidadavolu (2005) highlight, there are many 'mixed messages' which have been transmitted through education and other materials on abortion and sex determination. While awareness of the illegal status of sex selection is widely and commonly understood by people through the various high-profile anti-foeticide campaigns, comparatively fewer people know the legal status of abortion which was legalized in India in 1971 through the Medical Termination of Pregnancy Act.[11] In Bracken and Nidadavolu's (2005) qualitative content analysis of abortion-related materials used in Rajasthan, they analyse the use of different terms and how they give a rather different sense to the viewer or reader:

> When referring to abortion, safe abortion materials used the terms 'garhbhpaat' (abortion), or more colloquial terms such as 'bachcha girana' (literally, to make a child fall), safai (cleaning) … When referring to an unwanted pregnancy, posters and pamphlets used more sanskritic terms such as 'unnichchit' (undesired or harmful), 'awanchaniya' (unwanted), or less frequently, the more colloquial terms 'bojh' (burden), 'samasya' (problem) or 'galti' (mistake) were used in spots. While the use of colloquial terms such as *bojh* or *samasya* may make materials accessible to a broader audience, such words also hold pejorative connotations – used for unwanted girl children for example – and therefore miscommunicate and condone the practice of sex determination.

Thus, without even mentioning sex selection, the language of public information and education materials in their judgmental tone, as shown here, can indeed confuse the connected, though separate, issues of the banning of female foeticide and the legalization of abortion, producing a blurred public perception about abortion. Such materials can undermine the popular understanding of women's access to safe, legal abortion while simultaneously accentuating the sensitivities around female foeticide generating

contradictory connotations. While the authors argue for more responses and activities which are in tune with the local populations they are targeting, I would argue that the misinformation that occurs across India in this way occurs not only because of a failure to engage with local contexts, but also out of an inability to see the women (and men) outside of being 'natives' needing civilizing, education and awareness. Despite the many efforts to raise the awareness of female foeticide made in earnest, governmental and non-governmental actions on female foeticide have followed a directive to 'battle female foeticide' with this sense of *otherness* of the very populations they are attempting to access and educate.

THE NAWANSHAHR MODEL

Another example of postcolonial intervention is in Nawanshahr district Punjab where a localized government programme, 'The Nawanshahr Model', has shown the embracement of information technologies alongside its active anti-female foeticide awareness and enforcement campaign. Krishan Kumar, the deputy Commissioner of Nawanshahr, became a high-profile figure in Punjab when the programme was launched in 2005. The Upkar Coordination Society was established, comprising of approximately 35 non-governmental organizations and 4,000 members working toward combating the 'social evils' of female foeticide and drug addiction. The activities of the Upkar Coordination Society and the Suwidha Centre, both under the management of the office of the D.C., have a coordinated and integrated approach to their work. In summation, the social data which is collected by the Suwidha Centre such as the registration of births, medical records and registers of medical practitioners is also accessed by the Upkar Society, who does the outreach work in terms of awareness-raising and interventions.

Kumar set up the Suwidha Centre in 2005 a few years after taking office, which is a two-storey modern purpose-built facility standing next to the district government headquarters. Inside the Suwidha Centre are twenty-six windows, much like a bank teller system with a ticketed number system and a collective, seated waiting area, each window providing services ranging from passport services, to driving licences, to court order, to the registration of births, marriages and deaths. The Suwidha Centre has streamlined public services and utilizes them through a computerized system. The anti-foeticide cell exists in a room within the Suwidha Centre and represents the local government's surveillance of social data and information. The Nawanshahr Model, if to be at all characterized, has elements of data collection, analysis, policy-making and intervention within the remit of its district. The medical records, including the tracking of pregnancies from the first trimester to the birth, are available to the Upkar Society workers who use the information to do their awareness-raising within local communities. The anti-foeticide cell attracted attention because of its use of information technologies in accessing and cross-referencing large-scale data bases. Indeed, India in the early twenty-first century was one of the nodal points of information communication technologies

globally. However, the Nawanshahr Model extended the use of such technologies for the management and surveillance of social records and trends beyond the means of what had been envisaged before in any other anti-foeticide campaigns. The integrated computerized databases offer the 'knowledge' of the local populations of the district, perhaps comparable in some ways to the District Gazeteers of the colonial period earlier referred to. For instance, it is not merely the enumeration of females, males, castes, births and other data which are recorded. On-going surveys are conducted which then produce databases of medical records, patient files, registered doctors and scan clinics, nurses and reported pregnancies and recorded births, all of which can be cross-tabulated, cross-referenced and subsequently followed up by intervention.

> These medical audit reports are subsequently generated and necessary disciplinary action is taken against scanning centres who indulge in malpractice or do not comply with the rules. Thus, the campaign from both sides i.e. recording of data on pregnant mother(s) (social audit) from the society's side and medical audit of scanning centres can certainly help to bring down the cases of female foeticide. (Office of the Deputy Commissioner of Nawanshahr District: 2005: 4)

The centralized body of knowledge and information housed in the district government office's Suwidha Centre is accompanied by a range of continuing activities:

> Survey activities are conducted in the villages where all district officers including D.C. i.e. undersigned remains present. It also works as deterrent among the people indulged in this menace. Villages have been identified where sex ratio is poor. There are about 25% of the village(s) where sex ratio is abnormally low. Special attention was paid to these villages. Efforts were also made to know the reasons as to why sex ratio is low in these villages. (ibid.: 5)

Information-gathering, consolidation of data sets and the identification of sex-ratio patterns has been central to the Nawanshahr Model. However, perhaps more striking is the follow-up interventions which the Upkar Society undertakes with the support of the D.C.'s office. Demonstrations outside notorious clinics which continue to provide illegal sex-selection services have been held, including simulated mournings of the deaths of unborn female babies. Undercover Upkar Society workers have visited midwives, doctors and clinics and exposed them for breaking the law against sex selection. In January 2006 a function was organized to honour parents of newborn female babies. Numerous other meetings and gatherings have been held in villages in which social workers and Upkar Society members interact with village headmen, health workers and villagers in order to raise awareness about the campaign against female foeticide. With many of the social workers being women, the dynamics of the outreach activities show a concerted attempt to penetrate the domestic sphere in accessing women under the aegis of pregnancy, women's health and childbirth:

> a list is generated giving details of mothers having pregnancy from 3rd to 5th month. A lady operator in D.C.('s) office thereafter give(s) a telephone ring to these pregnant mothers and finds out if there is any problem to her or the foetus. It leaves an invisible impact on the minds of the pregnant lady as well as on her in-laws that somebody is monitoring and watching them. It discourages them not to go for sex determination test and then abortion subsequently. The computer software also generates a list of mothers whose expected date of delivery has already crossed. Enquiries through telephone as to whether baby boy or girl was born are also made subsequently. In case (where) there is none, investigations are conducted as to where (the) foetus has gone and under what circumstances it was aborted. This whole process facilitates better enforcement against the persons involved in female foeticide. (ibid.: 3)

This shows a significant development and departure from the colonial outreach exercises of the nineteenth century which intentionally remained limited to the public discursive sphere, were less interventionist and involved no women. However, the omnipotent, watchful eye of the Nawanshahr campaign shows a similar panoptical dimension to the local government's activities. Women in contemporary Punjab are certainly not hidden from the public eye, and are visible in the health services as workers and patients as well as being employed in the bureaucracy from which such campaigns are organized. The visible, strategic involvement of women in the campaigns does not necessarily mean a feminist praxis. When we analyse the activities of the Nawanshahr Model, it shows no direct challenge to the patriarchal socio-economic base of the society in which it is operating. Rather, the campaigns show a foremost embracement of modern technologies while attempting to show that capitalist development goals can be achieved with the proper checks of a vigilant and alert state. Thus, on its own, awareness-raising with penalties associated with the criminalization attached to female foeticide does not necessarily amount to radical action on son preference or sex selection. Rather than being an example of radical action, the Nawanshahr Model has perhaps attracted attention less for its innovative thinking on tackling female foeticide and more for its ability to work very much from within the technological, capitalist and masculinist modernity of the time while embracing its tools of knowledge and application. Missing is any fundamental challenge to patriarchal values or a questioning of gender relations and norms, making the overall approach to anti-foeticide as one which is 'disciplining the natives'.

The awareness-raising emphasis of the Upkar Society activities posits girls as the victims of cultural patterns which need to be addressed under the leadership of the governmental and non-governmental agencies. Perhaps it is the absence of a vocal organized civil society and women's movement in Punjab which has created the space for the Nawanshahr Model to operate unchecked as it does with its ad hoc schemes and undercover tactics which operate under the guise of good governance. In congruence with the colonial tactics of 'naming and shaming' infanticidal castes, the Nawanshahr Model does not seem to be entirely different, apart from its distinguishing features of the

new technologies of the time and of the involvement of women. In one instance, a mock funeral procession was held outside of the home of a woman in Nawanshahr district who had terminated her female foetus. The volunteers waved black placards and shouted slogans of 'girl-killers' to the family. As one of the female local child-development workers who attended commented: 'They almost died of shame. And it scared everyone else too. They'll all think twice about getting a scan done now' (*Sunday Telegraph* 2006). So if the aim of such a planned action is to 'name and shame' people with the desire to deter others from not having sex-selective abortions, then the awareness-raising could be viewed as a success. However, if the aim is to develop a long-term strategy for addressing the roots of son preference and female foeticide, then the Nawanshahr Model is highly suspect in its approach and must be viewed within this postcolonial frame in addressing the limits that state-led 'naming and shaming' techniques meant then and now. What the Nawanshahr Model *does* show, however, is that institutional responses to female foeticide can bring about responses by invoking 'fear of the law', which may be seen as productive in the short run, but counterproductive in the long run. Several localities within the district now brag to have improving ratios due to the efforts of the Upkar Society which shows that the postcolonial state in Punjab certainly holds currency:

> Women in Nawanshahr district … fear his telephone calls and surprise visits and dread their names being added to his 'watch list'. But his inquisitive methods are helping to stamp out female foeticide, a practice so widespread in India because of the preference for sons rather than daughters that *The Lancet* recently estimated that 10 million baby girls had been terminated in the past 20 years… Residents have taken little notice of legal and religious edicts banning abortions on the grounds of gender, but Mr. Kumar has found that social embarrassment – or the threat of it – has proved a much more powerful deterrent… Officials say that, with humiliation and encouragement, attitudes have finally changed. (ibid.)

There are many other examples of anti-foeticide-related activities across Punjab which show similar experimental attempts to make high-impact acts much along the lines of shock therapy. Cradle schemes where newborn female babies can be deposited, panchayats where awareness-raising has become integrated into local education programmes, mass marriages where couples can get married without the burdens of wedding expenses and dowries – all of which are continually reported by the media. When we look back to the colonial archives for historical legacies of anti-infanticide mobilization, we find that there are striking parallels between what was being done in the mid-nineteenth century in British Punjab to what has been done more recently in postcolonial Punjab. The legacy of the post-Amritsar darbar recommendations to regulate and curb wedding expenditures as a means of addressing the escalating pressures of dowry have been followed by the numerous mass marriages which have been organized not only in Punjab but also in other states.

One of the central themes within postcolonial theory is how formerly colonized societies understand their own histories, locations and identities, when it is the colonizer's base of records, educational and administrative structures which form the foundation of much of the raw knowledge from which empirical evidence continues to be drawn (Bayart 1993). The 'native' had no recourse to voice within the colonial record outside of her or his own binary position, yet the subaltern voice is one which resounds in the archives and records. As Singh (2008) poignantly argues, the colonial and postcolonial models of development in Punjab were not indigenous models to the region, from tax revenue collection under British colonial rule to the postcolonial Indian state forging its national food sufficiency through the region of Punjab's intensification of agricultural production. Instead, both of these examples show the continuities between colonial and postcolonial modes of rationalizing Punjab in the most economically productive manner.

While the white, male colonial administrator wrote with such authority about the practices and characteristics of the various castes and tribes of Punjab that had been studied, the Punjabi woman remained out of sight of the public eye. Many of the official advertisement and awareness-raising campaigns in the postcolonial context show a similar disregard for the views of and engagement with Punjabi women around the issue, and thus maintain a similar amount of distance in order to preserve the position of authority from which to speak.

Bhatnagar et al. in their postcolonial critique of colonial, elitist and nationalist pressures that impinge upon women's writing in India highlight the Meera tradition of poetry. Meera represents, in many ways, an anti-casteist, anti-sexist, anti-patriarchal critique of Rajput values around kinship and accumulation through stories of Meera, who from a young girl to a woman tells a story of estrangement from men-folk and rebellion and resistance to patriarchal control (172). The genre of poetry of Meera (1498–1546 Rajasthan) is a tradition which belies the colonial archives by exhibiting dissent and critique from a women-centred, anti-patriarchal, and thus subaltern perspective. Some of the poems and *bhajans* present messages of women's emancipation from male control through stories of Meera learning the art of warfare as a young girl, to her mother telling her she is wedded to the god Krishna as a pre-marriage warning about the perils of married life (Chaturvedi in Bhatnagar et al.) to leaving her marital home and subsequently engaging in civil war with her in-laws. Meera represents a subaltern voice of Rajput girlhood, womanhood and perhaps even an alternative gender world absent from the colonial and national archives. The postcolonial project within studies of son preference could be seen as a counter-project to the 'discovery' trope once used by the colonial administrators to find new examples of culturally criminal phenomena.

Thus, for the purpose of this discussion, a postcolonial critique of contemporary engagements with son preference requires an even momentary 'stepping out' of the accepted structures of knowledge and power in order to make a reading of the existing discursive practices around son preference. This relates to both historical and contemporary sources since, as Hall (1996) points out, the 'post' in 'postcolonial' is

not merely about temporality and the supposed end of direct colonial domination, but of the enduring legacies all around us that reflect imperialism's resilience and continuing hegemony over discourses, processes and structures of power and knowledge. Oldenburg's exploration into the masculinization of the Punjabi economy ('the economy grew moustaches') shows how it came to deny women the right to inheritance and access to the public space, and how it shaped the economy with contours of male dominance and female invisibility, despite women's on-going centrality to the core of the everyday functioning Punjabi economy and society.

This chapter has examined the ways in which colonial discourse operates within engagements with son preference in historical and contemporary Punjab. The production of knowledge and the actions made by the colonial agents reflected a position of righteousness around the 'civilizing mission' which was expressed through the manner in which the issue was publicized and in how different tribes and clans were labelled and then given incentives to take preventative measure of female infanticide. One example highlighted was of the Bedis who were made to intermarry with other lower-ranking khatri *goths* while being warned not to continue with the practice of female infanticide. Remnants of this incentive-cum-warning can be seen in the contemporary expression of a caste-pride discourse among this group, who, as a predominantly urban khatri *goth*, now marry almost on principle with other *goths* and castes as a symbol of the Sikh theological course toward anti-casteism.

It has been argued here that postcolonial interventions have occupied a common discursive terrain with colonial interventions in the manner in which records have been kept, data has been stored and the way in which the interventions have been formulated. Despite women being present in many postcolonial interventions, which is a significant departure from colonial activities earlier mentioned where women were completely absent, the visibility of women within postcolonial campaigns does not necessarily mean an ideological break from colonial discourse. In fact, the 'victimizing discourse' (Arora 1996) remains a strong thrust while an overarching view of the 'native' populace as backward, son-preferring and in need of disciplining in this respect has remained the driving force behind the various governmental and non-governmental anti-foeticide campaigns in Punjab. The 'foeticide fatigue' which was mentioned at the beginning of the book refers to this failure to break out of the colonial discourse on son preference in hope of pointing toward alternative ways of envisaging action and response which do not rely on notions of 'native' or traditional societies requiring disciplining actions of the state. The hands-off interventions of the colonial state and the more interventionist approaches of the postcolonial Nawanshahr Model show initiatives which reflect a paternalism of the state. These initiatives fail to address its complicity with the structural factors (casteism and patriarchy) which shape son-preferring attitudes, actions and behaviour. In doing so, such acts or actions are merely reflecting how the state across colonial and postcolonial time has required the status quo in terms of economic and political formations supporting capitalist penetration and development.

NOTES

1. Montgomery district was named after Robert Montgomery in 1865. In present day Pakistan the district has been renamed Sahiwal.
2. The meeting was organized along the format of a ceremonial imperial gathering, or 'darbar'. For a discussion of the formulation of ritual and officialdom of the imperial courts see Major (2006).
3. See Bhatnagar et al. (2005: 42–6) for a detailed discussion of earlier seventeenth-century enlightenment philosophy of John Locke and its use in legitimizing the notion that infanticide is evidence of non-European societies' innate backwardness and lack of morality.
4. Alexis de Tocqueville made a similar case in favour of France's civilizing mission in north Africa. However, de Tocqueville was less concerned with good governance in the colonies and focused upon what he saw as the economic benefits that colonialism brought France in its competition with rivals such as Germany and Britain. The economic gains were paramount to de Tocqueville while to Mill the moral justification for colonialism was provided by the civilizing mission.
5. Bayly (2001) notes how the castes and tribes loyal to the British during the 1857 uprising were given concessions or favourable treatment while Brahmins were undermined and viewed as traitors by the colonial state, reflected in the census and its policy outcomes. However, both the social movements and policy response surrounding 1857 were far more complex than this depiction of the British colonial state's suppression of the uprising and its subsequent approach toward caste and community. It would be an exaggeration to say that Brahmins were categorically targeted , as does the contested question of the role of Sikhs in the post-1857 fall-out: see P. Singh 2007.
6. The category of Jat Hindu in 1921 included people who would later be identified as Jat Sikh, as separate religious categories did not appear until the 1931 Census.
7. The colonial construction and documentation of caste relied upon a notion of each caste having an 'essential' set of qualities and traits which, of course, needs to be questioned in the colonial and in postcolonial times. Some rather crude, simplistic depictions which appeared in the colonial records continue to survive today. For example, the jats comprise of very disparate tribes who, despite being characterized and encouraged for their cultivation and agricultural expertise, do not occupy a uniform position within Punjabi society. Not all landowning households are jats, and not all jats and other landowning households are necessarily wealthy. Many are highly indebted and driven to suicide, in some cases along with some of their family members. A majority of jat households in Punjab own less than 2 hectares of land, and some of these households overstretch themselves beyond their means economically to educate their daughters and sons. Similarly, not all Brahmins are urban and educated nor are all khatris into moneylending or other financial 'services'. These are generalizations which were useful for the British in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries for understanding the vast socio-economic context of Punjab which, without such categories, would have remained inconceivable.
8. On the continuity between the colonial state policies and postcolonial Indian state policies in perpetuating the agrarian model of development in Punjab, see Singh (1994).
9. The 'White Man's Burden' was the title of a poem written by Rudyard Kipling in 1899 in marking Queen Victoria's jubilee. It projected the notion of (American) colonialism as a noble enterprise which had a moral and political duty to rule the 'developing' world.
10. For an interesting discussion of postcolonial development discourse in India, see Roy (2007).
11. The Medical Termination of Pregnancy Act of 1971 states that abortion is permitted up to 20 weeks of gestation for a number of medical and social reasons, however not for sex-selective purposes.

3 FIGURING OUT SON PREFERENCE

The harvest is so ripe, yet why are daughters still born?
Kanhkaan lambiyaan, dheeyaan kyon jammeeaan?

(traditional Punjabi saying)[1]

MASCULINITY ABOUND AND UNBOUND

Son preference is commonly explained for by using a range of different rationales for its sustenance over time and across cultures. Sometimes these explanations only present part of the picture and other times fail to consider the cross-cutting and often contradictory intersections of social and material processes, thus making any attempt to 'figure out' son preference seemingly insurmountable and ineffectual. The different trajectories of knowledge production which circulate within studies of son preference were presented in Chapters 1 and 2. This chapter will take the discussion forward in charting out some of the themes through which son preference is commonly explained. While there is a gravitation toward the idea that there may be an essential factor or reason which sets son preference up as a likely outcome, our discussion here will attempt to move away from the idea that there is a reason or reasons which can effectively offer an applicable model of explanation. Rather, it seems more useful to focus upon the multi-facets of social and economic organization and mediation to understand how son preference operates in and penetrates Punjabi society. The formulation of these discourses tends to iterate notions of a conceptual binary between, on the one hand, the preferred, doted-upon and deified son and, on the other, the neglected, burdensome and unwanted daughter. This binary, in its various expressions, presents limitations to the development of critical thinking and action, not only about son preference and female foeticide, but also about gender relations and other social formations more generally. While established notions of gender relations, through the binaries of male and female and structure and agency, present certain obstacles to the development of more rigorous debate on son preference, there are also many routes and options by which these binaries can be questioned and, if desired, disrupted.

There is a resilient, cultural hegemony which defends the preference for sons as a necessary survival strategy for the maintenance of lineage, property and the continuation of the (male-headed) family household. Implicit within this, of course, is the understanding that girls and women do not offer the same qualities or social positioning that men do in securing these goals. Femininity, as its counterpart, represents negative connotations of vulnerability, risk of honour and weakness to predatory male pursuits within a masculine world. Particularly as Punjab is a region which has always been at the gateway of India for outside invaders and conquerors, the place has embodied the gendered violence of this history. The abduction and rape of women as a tactic of conquer, violence and war has been seen in other contexts of conflict where women's bodies can be a site at which battles and wars are played out. Girls and women over time came to be seen, in particular by certain tribes and groups, as liabilities in case of attack by invading groups or during times of encroachment or political turbulence. This is just one of the many explanations given for son preference in north India and Punjab. However, it runs alongside an unproblematic characterization of the social world as being essentially masculine. As such, the positive associations attached with masculinity vis-à-vis strength, security, continuation and consolidation require some questioning. Female foeticide occupies a not so distant discursive space from this masculine hegemony in the ways in which public discourses and activism have been formulated, as will be examined in Chapter 4.

Another lens through which one can view the context of the declining sex ratios against women is the backdrop of state repression and secessionist sentiments in the state of Punjab, which began in the late 1970s and reached its peak during the 1980s to mid-1990s. During this time, 'liquidation' of men by way of extra-judicial killings and disappearances of a large number of Sikh young men in the anti-insurgency campaign by the Indian state, as well as the killing of Punjabi policemen and politicians by Sikh militants no doubt contributed in some ways to the shifts in the sex ratio of Punjab. This remains a completely unexplored area. The unexplored nature of this subject is partly due to the difficulty in accessing data on the numbers killed during the militancy era but even more importantly due to the explosive potential of such an analysis on the discourse on sex ratio in Punjab.[2] In light of the discussions in this book of state-led anti-foeticide campaigns, it is clear that the state finds it easier to make targets of women and girls in social welfare programmes than it does in addressing the complexities that have emerged out of the violence during the militancy period which saw an undeniable role of state repression upon Punjabi/Sikh masculinity.

While the social construction of gender undermines the blind interpretation of the household and other social units as any longer being quintessentially male-headed spheres, we see a stubborn loyalty within popular explanations of son preference to maintain this as the ideal. However, what is most striking for our concerns here is how, in the explanations of son preference and gendered social forms more generally, *male* and *female* continue to be upheld as separate albeit intertwined entities which form the

base of a structure of social relations which produce such outcomes as negative attitudes toward girls and daughters leading to declining sex ratios. However, when we begin to look around for signs and symbols which branch outside of the binary, they are ubiquitous. How might we, even momentarily, break out of the crude conceptual binary of the privileged son and the discriminated-against daughter to be able to understand these signs and symbols?

A starting point may be to become less loyal to or restricted by conventional definitions of gender, however loosely framed they may seem. Definitions have tended to be more useful for studies requiring units for analysis, in which men's and women's differential access to resources, opportunities and assets can be highlighted through such units as the household or the family. The cumulative effect of the adoption of definitions has been that studies requiring such units have eclipsed the array of processes and experiences which are often not visible within these units or definitions. The myopic focus upon 'the girl child' is one example of this in the ways in which it has been coined to denote the victimized girl whose own position and perceptions have largely remained ignored. Even a rather standard and widely accepted definition such as this one offered by Agarwal (1994) locks us into the binary, however earnest its intentions are for providing the reader with a means of conceptualizing gender relations in and beyond South Asia:

> The term gender relations as used here refers to the relations of power *between women and men* (my emphasis) which are revealed in a range of practices, ideas, and representation, including the division of labour, roles and resources between women and men, and the ascribing to them of different abilities, attitudes, desires, personality traits, behavioural patterns, and so on. Gender relations are both constituted by and help constitute these practices and ideologies in interaction with other structures of social hierarchy such as class, caste and race.

While the stereotypes, structural dimensions of gender relations and assignment of gendered roles and responsibilities is rightly included in this definition, the utility of this for its execution for future research on gender does not necessarily open avenues for the critical social theorist to generate new and innovative tools, methods or theoretical understandings. Despite the destabilization of previously accepted notions of femininity and masculinity as mutually exclusive and protected spheres by critical gender theorists such as Judith Halberstam (1998) and Judith Butler (1990), academic and popular discourses on son preference are still mired by the crude reductions of male = masculine and female = feminine. From the 1970s to 1990s, much attention was given to collating and recording information and research about women's experiences and material conditions, as they were seen to be the ones least documented while also suffering from male bias and a widening gender divide. A rich body of literature highlighting women's structural and experiential locations filled in this gap to official and unofficial accounts of economic and social development as active agents and participants (Elson

1995; Miller 1981, Pearson 1994, Harris-White 1999). What could be loosely termed as the 'women in development' and the 'gender and development' approaches were a sign of their respective times in the manner in which they wrote women into broader processes of development, whether as women or as a socially constructed category within a gendered set of processes. The context of the time and the evolution of the debates that such approaches have engaged with should be recognized and valued. They provided the databank of case studies and empirical evidence which now form a foundational archive for the field of gender and women's studies, not least in South Asia.

The men-women binary, albeit qualified with its intersectionality with other social hierarchies, continues to frame how we view gender. Thus, the picture of gender across societies through the social relations between men and women seems one which has already been 'figured out' despite its openness to acknowledge structure and agency while also understanding the power of social construction. The men-women binary, whether adopting patriarchy or a social deconstruction of gender roles, continues to form the base of definitions of gender relations in studies on South Asia. As Chopra et al. (2004) state: 'while two genders is of course a fabrication and a division not easily maintained, it remains foundational in the sense of being an ideal in popular consciousness and in society's structures'. Some may argue that we merely need to utilize such definitions and then apply them to different questions and areas, which in itself shows the limitless possibilities of gender research. However, I would argue that if we are really interested in understanding the signs and symbols of son preference that circulate, then our conceptual frameworks should be loose enough to accept and to acknowledge evolving structures and even emerging notions of gender which cannot so neatly fit into conventional understandings of gender relations offered to us by the gender and development and other literature available. While I recognize the merits of the vast and important contributions of that literature, I also view their contributions within the times that the respective authors were responding to. I might also say that my issue with them could be partially seen as a matter of starting point rather than one of conceptual or theoretical contention. Nevertheless, the imperative for more responsive approaches is to go beyond the limits of structure by not merely mentioning social construction of gender, but to actually developing ways of understanding the dialectical relationship between gendered social formations and structures and the big and small acts which respond to them.

It is striking that sex and sexuality are virtually absent within analyses of son preference, despite social reproduction and desire, whether in the desire for a son or for sexual pleasure in a wider sense, being at its heart. Sex is not something that one has to look too far for in contemporary South Asia. It is rife. Sexual desire and its mediation and commodification are conspicuously present across north India, not least in Punjab. Prostitution, eve-teasing, 'love' marriages versus 'arranged' marriages, sexuality, the proliferation of 'sex and skin clinics' treating all sorts of sexually transmitted diseases and sexual impediments are all part of a vast terrain of discourses on sex that reflect the

concerns and issues of the contemporary times. Where some have argued that sexuality, particularly that of women, is absent or invisible within public discourses (John and Nair 1998), others have shown how it is quite the contrary. One merely needs to utilize different tools for understanding and reading between the lines to understand how what may seem beneath the surface is fact a part of the popular psyche and consciousness. Puri's (1999) *Women, Body, Desire in Post-Colonial India* addresses these signs through a critique of hetero-normative sexuality through her study of multiple discourses of sex and desire in the narratives of urban middle-class women in India. Puri illustrates how normative heterosexuality is produced through an internalized, regulated mechanism by urban middle-class women. She analyses state-sponsored sex-education materials produced in India as well as exploring the narratives of women interviewed in Delhi and Mumbai in identifying the different national and transnational sources that these women draw upon in redefining and challenging sexual normativity. The field of son preference could benefit from more studies inclined in this way methodologically and epistemologically in raising more questions about the normative backdrop of son preference. What is the sexual and body politics surrounding son preference? What do women's bodies situated within an extended family reflect in the context of expectations to reproduce males? What do men's bodies represent? Women's bodies can at once be the object of sexual desire while also being the site for an uncompromising, clinical approach to the production of male heirs. The inherent underlying contradictions of the expressions of sexual desire and of the calculated misogynism of son preference beg for such attention. Such a line of questioning might push the limits of hetero-normative underpinnings of the biological reproduction of sons and daughters so often taken for granted within policy and public discourses on son preference. Why is it, for instance, that despite it being scientifically proven that it is men's chromosomes which determine the sex of the child, it is women's bodies which continue to bear the burden of sex determination? This goes beyond reproductive technologies. On a far more crude level, many women continue to be blamed for the arrival of female babies. One woman in Manchester, UK, around the age of 35, told me of how her husband had married a second time on this very basis, that she had borne four daughters, and he wanted a son, which he adamantly argued she could not produce. This woman is not merely a victim of the ideology of son preference. She is an example of how a popular cultural logic around procreation is inconsistent with the scientific reason.

The availability of reproductive technologies has joined this gap with a market of services which women, if they so desire, can access in order to show that they can indeed 'produce' sons. Technology is not the only route to availing male children. Anandhi (2007) found in her study of rural Tamil Nadu that women preferred to utilize 'local methods' of sex determination rather than reproductive technologies. These methods included looking for particular marks on the bottom of a girl child: two circles meaning the next child would be a girl and thus could inform the decision to abort the next pregnancy. Despite some women in the study acknowledging that such beliefs produced

false results, the use of such myths continued to be the guiding principle by which the decision to abort was made. The realm of myth, superstition and local belief practices is widely recognized as a women's domain. Thus, the management of pregnancy, the decisions that surround family planning and the preference for male children conveniently fit within this constellation of women-centred practices and belief systems. However, I would argue that this should further point us in the direction of men and their complicity and agency within the reproductive world, rather than absconding them from it.

The turn of focus toward men and masculinities, however, has certainly allowed for the oblique binary-based, women-focused lens to be broadened toward men and the hegemonic role that masculinity plays in reifying gender formations. While this could be seen as a challenge to the agenda of gender and development as an essentially feminist endeavour, the growing body of literature on men and masculinities is posing some critical questions to the dominance of feminism within gender studies and to the masculinist underpinnings of development policy and thinking. Most critically, perhaps, it is challenging the notion that there are two genders and that masculinity is what men do and femininity is what women do (Chopra et al. 2004: 9). A postcolonial view of masculinity is needed in order to understand how colonial perceptions and constructions of South Asian masculinities appear in new and emerging forms in contemporary contexts. As Kalra (2009) argues, this view of masculinity allows for a more nuanced approach toward gender and masculinity which is able to see the spectrum that exists between emasculation and hypermasculinity. The concerns surrounding masculinity's stronghold impact upon a whole range of processes and relations. Philip Oldenburg's (1992) examination of son preference in Uttar Pradesh analyses the deteriorating sex ratio and son preference as an outcome of families' desires to protect and defend themselves in times of violence. Thus, son preference cannot be merely understood through kinship and cultural bias, but needs to be put into context within the wider context in which son preference can often be seen as a strategic survival strategy.

If we begin here to conceptualize gender in Punjab as a means of understanding son preference, it would be more useful to take into account not only the structural backdrop to gender relations using more conventional definitions but more importantly to analyse contemporary processes using a range of different conceptual tools such as those which attempt to look outside of the 'two genders approach'. In focusing upon contemporary processes, a picture emerges which is less conducive to definitional terms. Butler's (1990) notion of the perfomativity of gender resounds across Punjab in the ways in which masculinity is celebrated through various exhibitions of its adoption. The musical dance form of bhangra, emphasis upon sports such as wrestling and kabaddi and the strong associations of popular culture with agricultural productivity, economic prowess and male strength form part of this backdrop. However, female masculinity also forms an integral part of this masculine culture, which is often conveniently overlooked and thus has remained unexplored. This goes beyond 'women behaving like men', as Halberstam

(1998) points out, but shows a more fundamental underlying sense of society not bound by the two genders theory. Women in Punjab possess and express a broad range of gendered identities and personas, as do men. Female masculinity and male femininity exist within a constellation of expressions of gender. Indeed, structures of gender operate in ways which show the tenuous nature of the binary approach to gender. Similarly, men do not simplistically exist within a terrain of male privilege and domination. The pressures placed upon boys by family and society to become men through acquisition of power, wealth and success have a range of examples of an emasculation of traditional notions of Punjabi masculinity. Unemployment, domineering mothers and fathers, the spoiling of boys from a young age, and an increasingly competitive context in which to find success and prove oneself are all contributing to the emasculation of Punjabi masculinity. Chopra (2004) offers a significant inroad into the examination of masculinity in Punjab through an analysis of hierarchic status and relative positioning. The father-son relationship, in this sense, can be best understood through an identification of the inherent patterns of domination, control and violence through the use of kinship terminology across a range of other generalizable social relations, including employee-employer relationships (p. 43). Chopra notes how the submission of the son or employee respectively to the father or the employer prompts behaviours by the subordinate through such acts as the use of the honorific particle 'ji' ('sir'), through the lowering of the eyes in the presence of the employer or father, never uttering the employer's or father's name and in a range of other protocols which socially institute and recognize the inherently hierarchical relationship. The 'coming of age' of adolescent girls and boys marks yet another series of acts which signify the hierarchical nature of social relations which cuts across the two genders approach. While mothers and other female relatives in Punjab generally look after the well-being and socialization of children, both boys and girls, once boys reach a stage where it is thought they need to be taught the ways of 'becoming a man', fathers and other male relatives begin to play more of a role in the lives and socialization of boys. In the context of rural Punjab, Chopra comments :

> Whatever this stage may be (and it may well be a combination of various bodily alterations as well as cultural markers) the boy increasingly moves out in the morning with his father into the fields to begin the process of making over his body from that of an unmarked child to that of a gendered person. (2004: 45)

The increasingly segregated activities and spaces occupied by girls and boys during the time of adolescence, however, points our attention to the manner in which certain societal checks kick in to ensure that gender norms are maintained and transmitted through the lifecycle. Obvious practices such as the requirements of pubescent girls to begin to wear a dupatta (whether draped across the shoulder or covering the head) point to pressures to emphasize both humility as well as concealment of the female, sexualized body in men's presence. Similarly, young men are increasingly pulled out of the women's

space which had reared and raised them since birth and brought into men's worlds in the public space. This segregation is made to seem normal, a part of the lifecourse and something to be emulated. While many women may even secretly aspire to attain strength, independence and autonomy associated with masculinity, many men continue to identify with and long for femininity and feminine spaces which they associate with their early developmental years, despite the imposition of masculinity upon them during their adolescent years and earlier. However, to merely accept that these mechanisms are executed and absorbed by young men and women as a one-way stream would be to dismiss any notion of their own agency. We may even go as far to say that the vilified figure of the Punjabi mother-in-law largely reflects these masculine aspirations of the woman who desires to express her strength and autonomy which was denied to her earlier in life. Even the softened male patriarch in his old age can reflect his own longing to express and receive intimacy from grandchildren and others which he associates with his formative years spent in the female domain of his mother and other female relatives.

What underlies this proposition is the manner in which son preference, as seen through the lens of masculinity, femininity and evolving social relations, represents more than merely a challenge to gender systems theories. New conceptualizations and interpretations of gender relations respond to the times and should not be merely enveloped within or reduced to being small acts within the overarching structures. Giddens's (1984) theory of structuration certainly resonates here in his projections of social life not being merely constituted by micro-level, individual acts, while also not able to be fully understood by an analysis of macro-level descriptions and accounts. Thus, social structure and human agency have a relationship with one another in which the repetition of acts of individual agents reproduce social structure – through an elaborate apparatus of morality, institutions, culture and traditions. However, there are also possibilities of change to social structure as people change the ways in which they do things, by either replacing certain acts with others or in doing things in an altogether different manner. Hence, as Giddens would argue, structure is equally vulnerable to alteration, amendment and change as individual agents' acts are. For our purposes here, structuration presents a critical view of definitions of gender relations in how change can be understood, not merely within the gendered structures but also as a means of actually (re)shaping how gender is conceptualized and therefore informing how we understand the worlds of gender that operate around us.

MANAGING GENDER THROUGH WOMEN'S EDUCATION

One significant world of gender is that of education. Female education has been a symbolic feature of both state- and international-level social development policies. Over the past few decades, the education of girls and women has been connected to a range of areas including targets to reduce fertility, improve infant health and reduce mortality, as well

as to improve other social indicators (Millard 1997). The appropriateness of educational training in terms of the skills being imparted – from literacy to technical skills – over time has been an on-going set of concerns in terms of how education policies should gear the curriculum specifically aimed at women. (For a range of comparative studies, see Subarao and Raney 1993.) Education for women in Punjab has a long history of debate and contestation in terms of how female education has symbolized the gender backdrop to wider social and political processes. While targets for female literacy have been seen as a means for uplifting or empowering girls and women, the introduction of formal and then higher education during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries saw how understandings of female education have largely been centred around normative notions of gender which saw a conservative reading of female education as one of social control, rather than transformation, in both historical and contemporary times.

Female education in India tends to be discussed in terms of literacy and equal access to formal schooling and the barriers that exist for girls in particular to go to school at and beyond primary level. The state of Punjab in India presents an interesting picture from the available data on literacy in this respect (Table 3.1). While the evidence shows that Punjab's overall literacy is only just above the national average, the differential between male and female literacy shows female literacy (63.55%) to be significantly higher than male literacy (75.63%).

Compared to other states, such as Bihar or Jharkhand where female literacy is almost half that of male literacy, the data on Indian Punjab reveals a marked improvement of female education in the state over the past forty years, from 24.65% to 63.55%, despite

Table 3.1 Literacy Rate for India and Selected States

	Literacy Rate			*Ranking by Literacy Rate*	
	Total	*Male*	*Female*	*Male*	*Female*
India	65.38	75.85	54.16	–	–
Punjab *	69.95	75.63	63.55	25	14
Kerala	90.92	94.20	87.86	1	1
Maharashtra	77.27	86.27	67.51	8	11
Gujarat	69.97	80.50	58.60	15	21
Haryana	68.59	79.25	53.31	16	23
Bihar	47.53	60.32	33.57	35	35
Rajasthan	61.03	76.46	44.34	22	29
Orissa	63.61	75.95	50.97	23	27
Tamil Nadu	73.47	82.33	64.55	13	13
West Bengal	69.22	77.58	60.22	19	19

Source: *Census of India* (2001).

male literacy still being higher than female literacy (Rajput 2004). This is in part due to concerted efforts to promote female education but also, it could be said, due to a certain affluence from green revolution economic growth in Punjab which resulted in increased disposable incomes, a proportion of which has gone to education.

The region of Punjab spans the nation-states of Pakistan and India, a border which was erected in 1947. This is a relatively recent history of separation and thus makes comparisons between the two Punjabs an interesting, however relatively unexplored, area. For our purposes here, I am merely posing this as a potential area for future examination and study. In Pakistani Punjab, we find other distinctive patterns of literacy and school attendance. While Punjab shows the highest literacy rate compared to that of other provinces in Pakistan, the distribution of access to education is by no means equitable, particularly when we consider gender and the rural-urban divide. Adult literacy (here counted only for people aged 15 and older) in Pakistan is just 50%, compared to 58% for South Asia. Even more striking is the differential in primary school net-enrolment between Pakistan and India, which is 66 % and 90 % respectively (Andrabi et al. 2008).

The comparatively weaker public education apparatus in Pakistan compared to that in India largely explains for this. However, the comparison between Indian and Pakistani Punjab is one which requires much more attention and methodological clarity than can be afforded here.

The two separate World Bank reports on education in the two Punjabs highlight some of the parallels between the predominance of a private education agenda globally, not just in South Asia, inequitable access to decent, affordable schooling and the gender differentials in terms of literacy and enrolment (see Andrabi et al. 2008). The executive summaries of both reports unsurprisingly reflect the global 'consensus' on privatization of education through the international funding streams which are more in tune to how the market can 'fill the gaps' than in how to ensure long-term strategies of equitable distribution and access.

Table 3.2 Literacy in Pakistan

Census Year	*Literacy Ratio*		*Enrolment Ratio*	
	Male	*Female*	*Male*	*Female*
1951	19.2	12.2	14.4	2.5
1961	26.9	8.2	20.8	5.8
1971	30.2	11.6	27.8	10.5
1981	35.1	16.0	19.9	10.0
1998	54.8	32.0	41.19	30.35

Source: Pakistan Census Report (Several Years), Pakistan Census Organization, Islamabad.

* Enrolment figures are taken from Economic Survey of Pakistan of corresponding years.

Table 3.3 Literacy, Percentage of Population aged 10 years and older by Province in Pakistan

Province	*Male*	*Female*	*Both*
Overall	65	42	54
Punjab*	66	47	56
Sindh	67	42	55
NWFP	64	30	46
Balochistan	54	20	38

Source: *Pakistan Social and Living Standards Measurement Survey (2005–06)*. Government of Pakistan, Statistics Division, Federal Bureau of Statistics, March 2007.

The purpose of education remains a looming question amid these debates around privatization. Most academic attention to formal education has taken the predominant view that its aim is to promote skills, social and/or economic mobility and transferable knowledge for the benefits of previously disadvantaged social groups (Dreze and Sen 1995). Scholarly attention to female education has further developed this 'empowerment' thesis whereby the approach 'if you educate a woman, you educate a family' has continued to prevail in most state-sponsored and NGO activity promoting women's education as critical to uplifting not only women, but to building upon their gendered roles to promote education more widely.[3] However, other studies have countered this assumption that education necessarily results in certain freedoms to be realized by these groups, whereby formal schooling can provide education to both advantaged and disadvantaged groups while not necessarily delivering employment opportunities within a competitive job market to all (C. Jeffrey et al. 2004). Thus, educational institutions can act as mediating bodies in maintaining structures and patterns of privilege and disadvantage, while offering false hopes of betterment and mobility. The ways in which different groups acquire, maintain and act upon the 'cultural capital' derived from education is highlighted in Bourdieu's (1984) seminal examination of class and education in France. In his own research Bourdieu argued that poor, educated working-class people overvalued their educational pursuits in comparison to the actual benefits that education realized for them in getting white-collar jobs and overcoming various structural inequalities in the labour market. The resonance of Bourdieu's thesis in the expansion of education in South Asia offers a critical view of how education should not merely be seen as a panacea to unequal development but should rather be viewed within a wider picture of how education relates to the political economy and social context in which it functions (Jeffrey et al 2005).

The literacy data in Indian Punjab mainly pertains to primary school education, which is the central concern of education policy at both state and national levels. While there has been a significant improvement in female literacy rates, there is little known

about the progression of young women through the educational system beyond this. An examination of higher education offers insights into how educational attainment reflects upon access to opportunities framed by gender and social relations. While there is a much smaller proportion of school-leavers going on for further study to college or university in India (3 per cent of men and 1 per cent of women), those gaining access to college or university, according to Bourdieu's 'distinction', would be seeking the credentials associated with holding a degree. In India, one-third of all students at college/university level are women and, despite being a small minority, are a group reflective of the symbolic and material associations of what higher education represents for women (Ministry of Human Resource Development 1993; comparable data at the state level not available). Of these women, their choices of course and fields offer further insights into this whereby engineering and commerce account for a much smaller proportion of female students, while the field where women account for nearly half of the total students is education (Ministry of Human Resource Development 1993). The training of professional women into 'safe' and 'respectable' fields such as teaching or even in the mass proliferation of 'home science' types courses geared toward enhancing women's home-making skills are some of the outcomes of the 'educate a woman, educate a family' discourse which has been important in how the purposes of education for women have been understood and how curricula have been developed and catered to, rather than challenging gendered norms.[4] In Punjab, the backdrop to this lies not merely in recent education development policy. Its roots lie in a long history of how formal women's education has emerged.

The emergence of formal women's education in Punjab comes out of a history of interactions across different interest groups, including the Christian missionary movement, colonial enterprise in Punjab and in the various social reform movements' responses to the changes going on during the nineteenth and early to mid-twentieth centuries. Under the British 'Raj' educational advancement was the means by which different communities could seek representation in the colonial bureaucracy. In Punjab, the growing salience of caste and religion in the process of identity formation saw a number of different shifts. By the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the rivalries between different religious groups saw the role of education becoming increasingly viewed as critical to each group's identity formation. Indeed, the formalization of religious and caste categories was not merely an enumeration exercise of the census but would also impact upon how groups viewed themselves, others, and then acted upon various issues (Cohn 1996; Pandey 1990).

Christian missionaries and Sikh and Hindu social reformist activities were influential in giving shape to the agenda of formal women's education in Punjab. Women's education in pre-partition Punjab was an issue which each community addressed within the private and public spheres and which male reformers of each community utilized within their own political discourses (Chanana 1997). Up until the late nineteenth century, home-schooling and religious schooling were the prevalent forms of education offered

to young women. The expansion of educational activities by Christian missionaries and Punjabi Hindu social reformists (*Arya Samajists*) between the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries politicized education, not least women's education, in terms which made reformers see the need to protect their young women against the advances of other educational endeavours in a public way – taking it 'out of the home' (Jakobsh 2003: 133). The impact of these debates was rather limited and focused upon the urban educated elites, with the majority of the population remaining unaffected and, more importantly, unconvinced of the imperatives for female education. The Sikh urban elites (*Singh Sabhas*) in Punjab used education as a theme by which to promote their ideals and did so through the printed mediums of newspapers and leaflets. Education and the upliftment of women were paired in their messages of rectifying what they identified as inegalitarian, superstitious and ignorant practices that had seeped into the Sikh community from Hindu rituals and practices. Thus, the *Singh Sabhas*, though factionalized in other respects, were united in their views on the importance of women's education. 'Women, it was acknowledged, were sinned against as infants, in their youth, as wives and daughters-in-law, and as widows . . . Education came to be intricately entwined with the upliftment of women and with the notion of nation-building' (Jakobsh 2003: 132). Indeed, the context of the identification of women as oppressed was embedded in colonial discourses around gender and culture, which saw the canonization of the civilizing mission's efforts to ban and codify anti-woman practices in its justification of its own patriarchal, imperialist endeavours in India (Mani 1990). Thus, the Sikh reformers were merely responding to decades of colonial reporting on practices such as sati, female foeticide and dowry, as much as they were acting as an internal critique of how community and communal discourses should relate to gender relations and discourses.

The various social reformist movements during this time were primarily made up of male leadership and membership and tried to give shape to women's education with an awareness of the other competing reformist activities going on. The Victorian ideal of the woman as 'helpmate', based on notions of purity, education and domesticity, came to represent not only 'civilization' but also how the emerging middle classes or elites could model their families and households (Grewal 1996). This ideal or central principle of the civilizing mission became adapted by the *Singh Sabhas*, however, only partially as the late annexation of Punjab meant that this would only superficially be effective. The *Singh Sabha* leaders came up with a mixture of 'Victorian notions of the helpmate with the work ethic of the Jat Sikhs' (Jakobsh 2003: 134). The popular imagery of the Jat Sikh became a mobilizing tool as it had not been significantly penetrated by the civilizing mission and was seen by the urban Sikh reformers as needing to be worked *with*, rather than *against*. The imagery of the Victorian 'memsahib' became juxtaposed with the Jat Sikh imagery of the female 'work-horse'. With respect to women's education, this developed into a somewhat compromising position on women's education, reflecting an engagement between colonial and reformist movements in giving shape to how female education should be viewed and developed. Jakobsh (2003) notes how a statement in a

Singh Sabha tract, the *Khalsa Advocate* (15 February 1905), made a distinct attempt to quell concerns that women's education would not reduce women's ability or propensity to work and certainly would not turn them into the stereotyped *memsahib* who was more of a 'kept' woman who needed caring for rather than the reverse:

> They say that domestic economy requires that women should not be educated. If they are educated they will refuse to do the work which they usually do at home… Is this objection of theirs well founded?... But happily it is only based on the superficial observation which our countrymen make of the habits and the ways of the English women living here. (cited in Jakobsh 135)

Within the *Singh Sabha* discourse on women's education, the distinction between the private and public domains was problematic in that it assumed an urban elite experience. For the rural household economy, women's and men's roles, while varied and highly gendered, also had certain parallel dimensions. Women's contribution to the production and subsistence of the household was a central component (whether recognized or not) of the work ethic earlier mentioned. Thus, the separation between home and the public that the reformers were encouraging (i.e. that the public would penetrate and uplift the private) was not perceived positively by a non-urban populace. Particularly for a rural elite group, such an imposition would have meant a capitulation to historical caste-based dynamics and tensions of urban moneylenders and middlemen dominating the domain of the dominant Jats. Thus, the subordination of the private domain to the public would have signified an emerging rural elite being dictated by an agenda set by a male, urban, educated, upper-caste leadership.

The ways in which different groups situated themselves vis-à-vis the colonial project is worth noting, particularly during the mid-nineteenth to early twentieth centuries. The colonization of Punjab was not looked upon negatively by urban high-caste Hindus and Sikhs, as well as by the Muslim *salariat* being recruited into the colonial apparatus, many of whom established their class positions through the colonial bureaucracy (Tandon 1968; Alavi 1989). However, in 1900 the Punjab Alienation of Land Act was cause for irritation by the urban elites as it limited land ownership to landowning 'castes' and would mark the creation of the rural Jats as a formidable social, economic and political force. The historical tensions between this landed 'gentry', or Jats, and the urban educated elites was not going to be resolved by the introduction of women's education, but rather aggravated by it. Thus, it wouldn't be for some time that women's education would develop in-roads into rural Punjab, primarily through post-independence state-run 'development' initiatives encouraging basic literacy. However, widening access for women to primary and secondary education (as illustrated in Table 3.1), while falling within the welfare or 'upliftment' approach to female education, has also led to the expansion of women in higher education, though reaching only a minority of women. As the college of this study shows, higher education has not existed outside of social

hierarchies and power structures. It has engaged with them, as well as acting as a platform and medium for the negotiation and mediation of social relations and their boundaries.

Women's value as part of a complex political economy of marriage and kinship has become attached to education, at least for some groups, within a rapidly increasing consumerist and materially aspirational society. Thus, the paradoxes of development, as also evidenced in other contexts, reveal a fundamental contradiction within capitalist development where wealth generation does not necessarily result in improved social equity. Kapadia (2002) notes how even positive demographic indicators, such as improving access to education or participation in paid employment of women, can be misleading and often conceal worsening trends such as declining sex ratios against females and continuing disparities of access and equity between men and women overall.

OF HEIRS AND GIFTS: DAUGHTERS AND DEVELOPMENT

The victim discourse draws upon a foundation of explanations of son preference based on commonly cited practices such as dowry, patriarchal kinship relations and male inheritance. The preference for sons has strong historical roots in how social relations, capital, assets and customs are managed and maintained. The political economy of Punjab can in part be charted out by looking at how power, hierarchy, wealth, control and stability have been at the centre of the maintenance of gender relations in the region. Perceptions of the desire and value of the girl and boy child does not merely come out of an inherent discrimination against girls and women. It emerges out of the ever-evolving and adapting convergence of social, economic and political processes. The structures which generate anti-girlchild sentiments also generate a number of contradictions. These contradictions contribute to the very structures themselves and are equally significant to understanding the foundations of son preference through, for instance, social relations and the economic rationale for preferring or even choosing to have male offspring.

The role that dowry plays in how inheritance and kinship relations are shaped has been explored in great detail by others (Basu 2005; Agarwal 1994; Singh 1983; Oldenburg 2002; Randeria and Visaria 2005; Sheel 1999). Despite the uncountable variations to how dowry is actually practised and how marriage alliances are made across South Asia and in the diaspora, it remains one of the most resilient answers to the son preference question. Feminists have been debating the dowry question for decades. Its relationship to inheritance and entitlement, women's status, poverty and wealth, and the power dynamics between the bride's and groom's families are just a few areas of focus of these debates. However, what is unanimously agreed upon within these discussions is that, on principle, dowry needs to be eradicated in all of its forms for its anti-woman message. As the report from a conference held in New Delhi in 2002 made by the All India Democratic Women's Assocation states, 'The practice of dowry itself is a crime, not just its excesses' (cited in Basu 2005).

Dowry and its associated kinship patterns form a popular explanation for why daughters are viewed as a liability and are thus not, by and large, the preferred gender. The payment of gifts and cash at the time of marriage to the family of the groom is one aspect to dowry and provides the foundations to a relationship between both sets of in-laws. A crude characterization of dowry, however, points us to the notion of dowry as an obligation of gift-giving, defined by one's socially defined role as either bride-giver or bride-taker. The bride, within this frame, becomes someone who is passed from her natal home to her conjugal home with little recognition of her agency within the entire process. Sharma (2005), however, highlights an important dimension to this which is how women partake in the accumulation of their dowries and thus play an active role in the process, thus not merely being objects for exchange. However, because of the attention placed upon dowry as an exchange or an obligational 'gift', women's agency remains ignored.

Even the institution of dowry remains commonly accepted to have existed since time immemorial, despite the fact that many questions loom around how and when it came to be constituted as a largely one-way flow of gifts in the direction from bride to groom's family. The hegemonized transition from brideprice to bridewealth (or dowry) is something which remains an academic exercise, and relatively unquestioned by popular notions of gift giving around kinship relations. First, the contrasts that exist between endogamous kinship systems (between groups who marry within their immediate group) and exogamous ones (those who marry outside of their proximate relations) requires some delineation in terms of the politics of gender which are represented in the ways in which gifts are given and women's position within these exchanges. Alvi (2007) has explored some of these issues in detail in a much needed comparative examination of kinship and gender in Muslim (Pakistani) and Indian Punjab where she highlights certain 'cultural' dimensions of Punjabi kinship which run across different forms of relatedness while other complexities and differences are maintained. Further to this, the need to distinguish between not only exogamy and endogamy but also regional and localized variations of hypergamy becomes evident once we begin to look at empirical examples. Srinivas (2005) pointed to the multiple and often disguised meanings of dowry through hypergamous practices, which seek to maintain that girls should marry men from 'superior' clans so as to maintain the asymmetries of gender. This entails an array of economic interpretations as well as cultural and customary ones which justify the exchanges of gestures and gifts between the two affinal kin-groups. The bride-givers, within the hypergamous justifications, must remain subservient to rather than on equal terms with the bride-takers so as to maintain the patrilineal line of inheritance, property and accumulation. This impacts upon the wedding rituals and other lifecourse rites of passage in which kinship relations are played out. It is through these rituals of pomp and splendour such as at the time of the *baraat* (arrival of the wedding party of the groom's relatives to the bride's parents' home) that sons become most evidently deified and exalted as a precious commodity. Veena Das's (1976) exploration of Punjabi kinship

through the idioms of 'masks and faces' is perhaps one of the most poignant observations of the complexities of social relations as woven through gendered hierarchies of location and interaction within the family. She illustrates the manner in which resistance and challenge are simultaneously expressed alongside compliance and cooperation through relations of kinship such as mother-in-law, daughter-in-law, elder brother-in-law and husband. In the process, multiplicities of roles are revealed through guises and performed interactions across these social relations.

Another set of questions within debates on dowry revolve around the crude demarcation made between bride price and dowry. This is a distinction which has been challenged, deconstructed and contextualized (Srinivas 2005; Caplan 1984; Billig 1991) in illustrating its lack of uniformity in South Asia. The ways in which different localities, communities and kin-groups make sense of changing pressures upon the household to make alliances through marriage is exhibited in how dowry is practised. While modern dowry practices have been argued to be an interpretation of earlier systems, bride-price and bridewealth (dowry) are less oppositional to one another as it may seem (Randeria and Visaria 1984). Technically speaking, modern interpretations of dowry have evolved out of *stridhan*, or property which has been given to a woman by her natal family to be taken with her to her affinal home. Goody and Tambiah (1973) characterized this as a share of daughters' inheritance which, as opposed to their brothers who would receive a calculated division of assets between brothers upon parents' death, a daughter is given a gesture of household goods, cash, jewelry and other items as a symbol of her share of her ancestral inheritance. *Stridhan* was historically associated with wealth given to the bride which she took with her upon marriage, and not wealth transferred to her in-laws. While *stridhan* theoretically belongs to the woman, its control is wielded jointly by her and her husband, as well as her in-laws, in many cases. However, bride-price should not necessarily be seen as an oppositional transmission, as Randeria and Visaria (1984) argue. The flow of cash and gifts from the groom's family to the bride's represents the compensation to the bride's family for their loss of her labour and also ensures the transmission of rights to the bride from her parents to the groom.

Modern interpretations of dowry, however, while emanating from *stridhan*, have come to symbolize dimensions of the asymmetries of hypergamy rather than the assurances of a bride's share of her inheritance. It is precisely at this juncture of the interpretational elements of bridewealth and its anti-woman message that knowledge production of dowry crystallizes. As Agarwal (1994) so succinctly points out, the contradictions which are so rife across South Asia around women's entitlements and inheritance show, on the one hand, a recognition of women's rights to inherit property while on the other hand, there being no policy discussions to ensure that women are included in efforts to redistribute land over time. Women's rights have thus been systematically eroded by the lip service paid to women's formal rights to inherit property by law, while there are cases few and far between which show women actually availing these rights.

While dowry on its own does not sustain an explanation for the persistence of son preference, its combination with other pressures upon the household unit certainly reifies it. The strength of the household and the local and regional economy have come to be connotated with the masculinity of its economic model of growth. Much attention has been given to 'development' in Punjab as it has related to indicators of economic growth. In the Indian context, being the state popularly labelled as the 'breadbasket' of India, its economic growth in terms of agricultural production has been widely celebrated as a success of 'modernization', capitalist agriculture, technological inputs and even a Punjabi work ethic. However, growth and productivity are insufficient in themselves to speak about the experience of the patterns of development in Punjab. As early as the 1970s, critiques of the social effects of the green revolution were quick to point out some of the more discrete impacts upon the labour force and social equity that occurred as a result of mechanization and intensification of agricultural production (Byres and Crow 1983). The complexities of Punjab's pattern of skewed development are poignantly drawn out by Singh (2008) through an empirically justified characterization of Punjab as 'rich but not developed,' due to the shaping of these processes through centre-state relations. Singh points to how the redistributive principle, which has historically ensured that the gains of, for example, green revolution output were channelled away from Punjab, presents certain inherently crippling effects upon the potential for resource mobilization for social development in Punjab through its declining resource position.

The displacement of women from 'traditional' agrarian roles shifted most women to the bottom of the emerging labour hierarchies. The 1974 report of the Committee of the Status of Women in India (Government of India 1974) noted that despite the intentions of the Indian constitution in its provisions for social equity, development since independence had been accompanied by a deterioration in women's societal position indicated by worsening sex ratios, declining female work participation, low rates of literacy and high rates of female mortality. The situation in Punjab could certainly be framed within this analysis. Some of the trends in how son preference and sex selection have been understood in Punjab alert us to the dangers of viewing social development merely as a by-product of economic development. The precedence of economic development over social equity has been an obstacle to feminist and other social development work and networking on the issue.

The experience of 'development' in Indian Punjab is a good example of how economic development does not necessarily result in improved social development (Singh 2008). In fact, it provides an illustration of the paradoxes that the neo-liberal agenda presents to concerns of gender equity (Kapadia 2002). The agricultural capitalist mode of development from the 1960s onward followed then by the neo-liberal model from the early 1990s has seen heightened sense of women being 'squeezed out'. It has witnessed rapid agricultural and industrial growth while the state has consistently boasted one of the highest per capita incomes in India. Alongside this are other shifts such as the decline of the rural population from 71 per cent in 1991 to 66 per cent in 2001.Urbanization

has increased from 23 per cent in 1991 to 34 per cent in 2001. The improvement in overall literacy figures from 58.85 per cent in 1991 to 63.55 per cent in 2001 is also notable (Census of India 2001).

The identity of the state and region is strongly linked to an essentialized Punjabi culture which is seen as masculine, growth-oriented and fertile. Its high economic development indicators, the green revolution, and a celebrated masculine popular culture rooted in a strong tradition of patriarchal, male-headed households all contribute to this popular culture. However, while the state of Punjab in India has consistently had one of the highest per capita incomes, it has also consistently had one of the lowest sex ratios in the country. Hence, the state's economic strength does not necessarily translate into more equitable social-gender relations/indicators with all of these stereotypes, processes and notions circulated alongside one another. The sex ratio and the female foeticide issue are indeed another dimension of this popular conception of the social context of Punjab's development experience.

Singh (2008) takes a critical look at the impacts that the green revolution had upon the peasant economy, which still today provides a strong influence upon the values, aspirations and practices of wider society, despite urbanizing trends. The green revolution saw a culture of cash introduced 'which replaced traditional peasant values of co-operation with competition, of prudent living with conspicuous consumption' (p. 185). Women of landowning families were retracted from the fields and hence lost a certain amount of autonomy and mobility within their households and communities. For landowning, particularly jat women, economic development translated into heightened economic prosperity of the household but without a challenge to gender inequalities. There is a danger, however, to romanticize 'traditional' Punjabi culture as having been corrupted by the green revolution, as though gender conflicts did not exist before capitalist agriculture. Beyond, in the neighbouring state of Haryana, Khanna (2009) tracks the social and cultural changes that have accompanied urbanizing processes upon the jat community who have settled in Shahargaon, south of Delhi. Khanna notes how their practices and attitudes toward marriage, family building, son preference and daughter neglect have evolved and changed in response to both internal and external processes which need to be viewed in the context of the community's everyday lives rather than an essential cultural or caste trait (p. 12).

This chapter has attempted to highlight how son preference in Punjab can be more fully understood through a number of different lenses, including masculinity and femininity, development and the management of gender relations through education, rather than through the narrow picture of the victimized girlchild. Karin Kapadia notes how many analysts argue that women's status in India is improving through three development indicators: access to education; access to paid employment; and demographic data showing fertility decline which they argue indicates women's empowerment, autonomy and education (Kapadia 2002: 1). Such quantitative indicators do not offer a nuanced

picture of how social relations relate to and are reflected in these indicators. (See Sudha and Rajan 1999: 590; Das Gupta 1995: 483, 485.) Bannerjee (2002) points out that disparities of access to education and labour markets between men and women remain, despite positive indicators of women's improved access. Thus, a more penetrating analysis of demographic data which connects the decline in fertility or improved literacy with other patterns such as declining sex ratios reveals a complex set of questions around marriage and labour markets, culture norms and trends, the gendered context of class aspirations, and the positioning of girls and women in relation to economic, social and political structures. The difficulties of charting these interconnections seem too vast a task for most policy-makers attempting to address gender disparities in South Asia. To do so would require asking questions about structures and processes which provide the basis for the market and neo-liberal proliferation, something most policy-makers and other agencies are in cahoots with. Thus, the policy agenda remains uncritical of structures and instead proceeds to target women and the 'girlchild' as victims and as beneficiaries of state and other agency-sponsored efforts rather than viewing women (and men) as agents and participants in the worlds of gender that generate son preference.

NOTES

1. This proverb associates good fortune with bountiful harvests and misfortune with the birth of daughters. It is most commonly found in folk and wedding songs sung by women.
2. A friend, Pritam Singh, told me about a conversation he had with Rajan Kashyap, a high-ranking civil servant of the Punjab government, on the subject. In spite of the generally friendly nature of the conversation between them, Kashyap reacted angrily to Pritam Singh's suggestion about research on this issue as 'an outrageous idea'.
3. This type of approach has been criticized for its WID (Women in Development) perspective, which fundamentally relies on an understanding of a private/public gender division with women as nurturers, carers and centres of the household, and men as income-generators and less present in family matters, particularly in their involvement in children's upbringing and education.
4. A study by the Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD) (1993) shows that at the all-India level women count for only 29 per cent of teachers at primary level, while only 22 per cent of teachers in higher education are women.

4 ANTI-FEMALE FOETICIDE: BETWEEN ACTIVISM AND ORTHODOXY

Anti-female foeticide and sex selection have become highly topical in contemporary India, not least in Punjab but also in other states which have been characterized as 'kurimaru' (daughter-killing) states. In fact, anti-foeticide sex selection could arguably be said to be one of *the* issues of public concern since its indoctrination within the popular psyche since the early 1990s. Beneath the veneer of its high-profile status within public commentaries on society and culture in Punjab, we find a complex array of dynamics of voices and dynamics of activism, patriarchal resilience and even an emerging hegemonic orthodoxy of anti-foeticide. I locate this orthodoxy within its postcolonial context of being a site of 'naming and shaming' a notion of an *essential* or grassroots Punjabi culture from which urban, bureaucratic Punjab has attempted to distance itself in creating a sense of otherness. However, the urban middle classes who also occupy this position in Punjab have not been immune from accusations and fresh discoveries of female foeticide. A report in *The Times*, London (27 November 2002), headlined 'Delhi's Rich Adopt Gender Selection of the Poor', revealing how the media's desire to locate son preference and 'know' it continues alongside government and other agencies in India attempting to do the same. The article started with a historical backdrop to female infanticide in rural areas where 'girl babies (were) smothered, drowned or simply abandoned by poor families desperate to have a boy'. The article continues by saying that 'an alarming new trend: the spread of the gender imbalance up the social scale assisted by new technology available to the increasing number of Indians with money to burn'. Hence, in a single sweeping article, a barbaric practice (infanticide) which is said to have come out of rural poverty, has now spread to the urban wealthy classes in an advanced technological form, a flawed argument from its inception.

Such reports show that it is not possible, though many still do, to identify any one caste or class or to label something a practice of the rich or poor. Son preference and female foeticide have diffused well beyond any identifiable boundaries that it almost

appears incomprehensible. The inability to locate its practice within particular sections of society or to chart out prevalence in India has been an on-going obsession, it could be said, and one which is not likely to be quelled, despite the numerous reports, plans and fact-finding missions. Amid the flowing production of such articles in India as well as in the West, the characterization of Punjab as a son-preferring society is by and large not challenged as a point of validity from any camp. In fact, if given the choice, it is often cited that the birth of a son would be viewed favourably compared to that of a daughter with, undoubtedly, many exceptions in between. As a survey published by the Institute for Development and Communication (IDC) in 2001 found, 45 per cent of the respondents admitted using some conscious method, whether technological or spiritual, to produce a male child. The subliminal desires and preference for sons, however, remains unquantifiable and beneath the surface despite the policy and research efforts to continually illustrate its tangible effects. It is perhaps at the subliminal level that we find some of the most critical thinking which goes beyond the surface-level campaigns and awareness-raising.

This chapter is concerned with the responses to female foeticide which I term as anti-foeticide activism – in which I loosely band acts, actions, formal programmes and other public commentaries. I will explore what I see as an orthodoxy that has emerged around the anti-sex selection issue in which very few find it difficult to disagree (at least publicly or officially) that sex selection is something to be condemned. The convergence of government, medical, media and public health agencies in occupying the discursive space of anti-sex selection in Punjab is somewhat of an anomaly, compared to other parts of India such as Maharastra or Delhi where women's groups and feminist voices have placed certain 'checks' on the ways in which anti-sex-selection activism is formulated and voiced. The taboo which has come to be associated with female foeticide has resulted in a public discursive orthodoxy on female foeticide alongside a private acknowledgement and even desire for its decisive outcomes.

In 1999 the appointment of Bibi Jagir Kaur as the President of the Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee (SGPC), the supreme management committee for historical Sikh shrines, attracted attention from the public and media as it was the first time that any woman had held such a high-standing position. Seen as a momentous appointment, many also noted its accompaniment to the election of the Akali Dal party to power in the state of Punjab. The Akali Dal has a widely diffused and popular social and electoral base in different sections of the peasantry, though with a hegemonic social, economic and political influence of the large landowners. So, Bibi Jagir Kaur's Presidency was viewed rather cautiously by many as a seemingly patronizing gesture rather than any commitment to gender principles by the Akali Dal Party who were in power at the time. Indeed her efforts to allow for women to perform *kirtan* (Sikh hymns) inside the Golden Temple was upheld as a long-awaited, much needed change. On the other hand, her fervent campaigning against female foeticide resulted in a religious edict stating that not

in any way does female foeticide have a place in the Sikh religion. Bibi Jagir Kaur's home village Begowal near Ludhiana soon thereafter became the site of much celebratory writing about anti-female foeticide strategies at the local level where panchayat leaders were found to be making changes, in whatever small ways, to local sex ratios. It is likely that the media was used to burgeon the political weight and influence of Bibi Jagir Kaur (who was in close favour with Prakash S. Badal, the Chief Minister of Punjab at the time) by highlighting stories from her village area. Perhaps this is speculation. What is more interesting was the muffled case of her daughter's death in 2005, in which it was alleged that she had forcibly undergone an abortion under her mother's instruction with the mysterious involvement of a Phagwara-based couple and their service staff. The story carried multiple levels of contradiction emerging out of the performance of abortion. This was a private story which would have remained hidden in the personal space of the family. However, the tragic death attracted attention to the case and shed light upon the performance of anti-foeticide activism by Bibi Jagir Kaur and the Begowal examples. The revelations that a woman of such political stature could be a 'kurimaar' (literally, daughter-killer) certainly raised questions about how, why and by whom the message of anti-female foeticide was being promoted. A woman so visibly at the forefront of official statements against female foeticide at once became a 'kurimaar' and an example of the hypocrisies generated by the orthodoxical discourses on female foeticide.

One might say that the above example has something to say about the ways in which '*the woman issue*', as it is often referred to within policy discussions in India, still remains as a point of charity and social inequality which provides a reliable source of causes which political interests can attach themselves to. On the other hand, female foeticide also brings out some of the tensions within conceptualizations of gender and feminist strategies. The fact that it was Bibi Jagir Kaur's daughter and not daughter-in-law startled many in that the case seemed to go even beyond the stereotype of the older generation woman as the oppressor or perpetrator. In this case, it was the mother, for whatever reasons, who was involved in the mysterious circumstances of the abortion and death. For our purposes here, it is interesting to note how public anti-female foeticide reports continued to be produced alongside this story. Much cynicism of official campaigns followed, not surprisingly. However, what allowed for this case of a high-profile supposedly pro-women, anti-female foeticide campaigner to over night turn to a case of female foeticide, if the allegations were true of sex-selective abortion? Beyond this case, the absence of a formalized and networked women's movement in Punjab has allowed for non-feminist voices on anti-sex selection to direct anti-female foeticide discourse, thus shaping an emergent orthodoxy on the issue. This has occurred within a vacuum in which there are few NGOs or other civil society organizations operating in Punjab to challenge the boundaries of engagement with anti-sex selection activism. Thus, it is no wonder that such pronouncements against female foeticide made by government agencies have failed to evoke or become part of a politicized, feminist public discourse on anti-sex selection and son preference. It has therefore become rather perversely possible to be anti-female

foeticide while simultaneously remaining firmly within patriarchal definitions of Punjabi social relations and authority. One can continue to believe that sons are an indispensable asset to family-building while also being outspokenly against female foeticide, as though these two positions are not inextricably linked or generate inherent contradictions in thought and practice. However, this is by no means an argument that feminist thought does *not* exist in Punjab or that there are no feminist voices within Punjab. In fact, it is quite the contrary. These voices circulate in response to official anti-sex selection and anti-foeticide campaigns which occupy a hegemonic space of authority and officialdom while also responding to the privately practised and held beliefs at home. The gap between official discourse on foeticide and women's and feminist voices is at the heart of the orthodoxy around female foeticide which has emerged in Punjab since the mid-1990s. The unacknowledged and unrecognized small and large acts of autonomous and collective acts against son preference and female foeticide cut deeper into the gendered backdrop of society than government and other awareness-raising campaigns can. Such acts challenge more deep-rooted questions around how and why daughter discrimination and son preference continue to prevail.

ANTI-FEMALE FOETICIDE CO-OPTIONS

Earlier, the Nawanshahr Model was presented as a case study of local government attempting to show its commitment to act against female foeticide. The postcoloniality of the Nawanshahr Model comes out in the pronouncements and 'naming and shaming' of culprits and perpetrators. However, what stood out across colonial and postcolonial time, for our purposes here, is the absence of women, apart from being 'victims', within the public discussions on female foeticide and female infanticide of the mid-nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries. With this historical lens, campaigns should not be viewed simply as acts of activism. They must be understood for the politics of gender and culture that they represent and the broader context in which they operate. Indeed, female infanticide served wider purposes within the British colonial expansion in South Asia. Postcolonial acts of anti-foeticide, I would argue, can and should be viewed critically and analytically for the discursive and political points that they make more widely about society.

The campaign launched against female foeticide in 2005 in Nawanshahr is a propitious example of where a high-profile anti-foeticide campaign serves agendas far beyond foeticide. The ricocheting accusations between medical and social activists and the government for a failure to enforce the law after the enactment of the PNDT Act resulted in a series of responses, ranging from apathy to an almost militaristic style of operation in 'eradicating the menace' of female foeticide. Nawanshahr represents the latter response. Initially, the district administration was criticized in the media for what was characterized as a misdirected approach in the manner in which it targeted women undergoing sex-selective abortions rather than the medical personnel who conducted the

procedures. Soon after the launch of the campaign, cases were filed against six women who were arrested for undergoing the ultrasound scan and then having abortions. The outcome and message that spread was that women, whether under conditions of duress or choice who undergo sex-selective abortions are punishable. However, it is worth noting that under Section 23(3) of the Act, any person seeking out the use of pre-conceptive or pre-natal diagnostic techniques on a pregnant woman is considered in breach of the act 'including such woman, unless she was compelled to undergo such diagnostic techniques'. However, this is followed by Section 24 of the Act which says that 'the court shall presume, unless the contrary is proved, that the pregnant woman has been compelled by her husband or the relative' to undergo such procedures. This presents an interesting juncture at which women's positionality at once can shift from that of culprit to that of victim.

Adjustments were made to the campaign which took a rather contentious stance in identifying, naming and shaming medical personnel, going as far as to, only in a few instances, strike doctors off registers. In a rather symbolic sense, the punishable crime that came to be attached to female foeticide was now applicable to two constituencies: women undergoing the sex-selective abortions and those professionals providing the sex-selective services. The Nawanshahr Model, in its targeting of medical professionals, had taken the argument of the 'impossibility of justice' (Menon 1998) to new heights in creating a culture of surveillance and punishment in order to create a possibility to identify and convict those 'guilty' beneath the gendered layers of social relations. The model also based itself on a premise that it could get to the heart of the collusion between son-preferential attitudes and the available medical technologies. While Indian women's groups had been arguing since the 1980s that enacting anti-female foeticide laws would not address women's status or improve their well-being, the Nawanshahr campaign bypassed any such concerns and devised a system of identification within which its paternalistic governmental role created a culture of fear rather than politicized consciousness in deterring people from engaging in sex selection. The medical establishment – *dais* (traditional midwives), ultrasound clinics, doctors and nurses – came under the watchful eye of integrated databases of medical and social records earlier discussed. The registering of pregnancies, births, clinics and scanning machines has provided the 'information systems' to monitor and catch practices of sex selection without any consciousness-raising or feminist engagement from below or above. Thus, the anti-foeticide 'campaign' of Nawanshahr can be very much located within an approach which is favourable toward the technologies of information and of the modernizing force of the state's outreach into local communities.

Missing, of course, is any connection being made between multinational capital, technological penetration into developing societies and of the disregard that this form of growth-oriented development has for social equity, including gender relations. In India, this is a tension which is not new. Technologies, including information, agricultural and biomedical, have all been at the forefront of the region's trajectory of development for

decades. The technological determinism that new reproductive technologies (NRTs) offer for social relations and social reproduction cannot be underestimated. The market is a significant one. One of the world's largest companies, General Electric (GE), has taken the largest share of the market for ultrasound scanners with its Indian collaborator WIPRO. GE Capital provided cheap credit to buyers which assisted the company in achieving its domination of the market. A court order against the company produced a list of 5,000 Indian buyers from GE-WIPRO which revealed a disproportionate number of machines in North West India, the region where Punjab and other low child sex ratio states are located. Despite the company CEO signing an assurance in 1993 that the machines would not be used for sex-selective purposes, the marketing strategy of the company's operations in India were found to be targeting small and medium-sized towns in this region. The court order also referred to the selling of ultrasound machines to 'quacks' or unregistered, unqualified people (George 2002). The Nawanshahr example, of course, brings all three technological expansions together – agricultural technologies in terms of the capitalist form of agricultural development that dominates the economy of the district, the use of information technologies in the data-gathering and social audit exercise of the Suvidha centre and of the new reproductive technologies used for sex selection. This convergence in itself makes the Nawanshahr example one worthy of attention in how it draws our attention to the response as one of the 'sign of the times'.

The media has been an important conduit through which debates, discussions and 'discoveries' have been made. The Nawanshahr campaign has attracted a considerable amount of attention in this respect. Some even attest that the DC of Nawanshahr had used his anti-foeticide campaign as a publicity stunt to gain favour with state and national level politicians, during an era in which the state's accountability and credibility with the public had been questioned.[1] The Suvidha Centre certainly won favour with many with its window teller system and open-door approach to public information and services. The fall-out of post-1984 economic and religious sub-nationalism when the movement for a separate homeland for Sikhs was fuelled by sentiments that the fruits of capitalist agricultural development had not been borne by Punjab was soon followed by a BJP-led national level 'India Shining' economic growth agenda promoting business and investment, with little mention, if only tokenistic, of social welfare or state subsidies. Thus, the profile which the Nawanshahr model presented generated a primarily positive and celebratory tone from initial reports of its exemplary posturing of the state's rejuvenated image as a protector of social rights. However, it did not take long for more critical analyses of the campaign to emerge. The following is an excerpt from a report made in April 2006 published by Women's Feature Service, appearing in different versions in a number of newspapers in Punjab, after six women had been prosecuted for being in breach of the PNDT Act. The report came out after much hysteria about the fact that it was the women undergoing the scans and abortions who were the ones being prosecuted, raising many issues around the tactics and approach of the model itself:

> Collector Krishan Kumar, however, asserts that the women are not free of guilt and have to face action. He is willing to make concessions, though. 'I would let the women go if they turned approvers and told me the names of the doctors who performed sex determination for them', he says. The women, though, are terrified and not willing to come out of hiding to speak to the administration. (Menon 2006)

> A visit to the homes of four of the six women booked under the Act revealed that three of them were in hiding – a stark reminder of their precarious position. These women are caught between the law that the State is using against them and their own society, which treats them as a pariah if they give birth to a girl child. Son-preference is a deep-rooted phenomenon in many parts of India and women who do not give birth to sons more often than not face social stigma, familial disapproval (and worse) and even divorce or desertion by their husbands. (ibid.)

Both within and outside of Nawanshahr district, there have been strong-felt responses which have voiced a sense of women being unfairly reprimanded, with communities having no recourse to the state's 'interventions'.

> Kamal of Musapur in Nawanshahar has been charged with sex-selective abortion. No one in Musapur village, where she lived with her husband's family, is willing to talk about Kamal or her whereabouts. Her in-laws also claim to know nothing of her whereabouts. This mother of two daughters has been in hiding ever since the case was registered against her. (ibid.)

The individual and collective scenarios of pregnancies carrying girls have much to say about the circumstances behind which many people choose to sex-selectively abort. However, the presence of women as the campaign's target illustrates that they are far from absent in the Nawanshahr model, but are extremely ubiquitous.

> The family is furious about the charge against Kamal. Says Jitta, 20, a relative, 'Why is the Collector harassing women for aborting girl children? Does he have any idea of what the girls have to suffer if they cannot get married? I have studied up to Class 12 and have done various courses. What has he done to ensure that I can earn some money? Does he know that Kamal's elder daughter suffers from tuberculosis, and that her husband is only a manual laborer in Dubai? Obviously, they cannot afford three girls'. (ibid.)

> Kamal's brother-in-law Harcharan Singh says that the State should target doctors, and not the women, who just happen to be the weakest link in the chain. (ibid.)

Such complaints about the scape-goating of women were met initially with a defensive position of the administration which saw the root of the problem in terms of demand

rather than supply, a theme which was addressed in Chapter 3. The trail between the social context of pregnancy and its medicalized management became highlighted within this discussion and wider public discourse of the time:

> But why is Kumar not gunning for the doctors, who perform these tests and abortions for no reason other than sheer greed? (He comments:) 'That is futile, because these women have the money to get the tests done outside the district', he says. Besides, not all the culpable doctors are within his area of administration.
>
> While Kumar's campaign has a distinctly anti-woman edge, his earnestness is clear. He has devised an elaborate system to monitor every single pregnancy in the district. He has roped in all the NGOs in the district, and even college students, to act as envoys for the cause. They work to create awareness, and inform him on early pregnancies and possible female foeticides. The machinery is impressive – and would work just as well if doctors were targeted instead of the women. (ibid.)

As mentioned earlier, this position made a quick turn around due to public pressure, and the campaign began to track and regulate the activities of doctors and clinics within its monitoring activities alongside the identification of women through pregnancy and birth records. With such public pressure to show the achievement of 'results' rather than merely uttering rhetoric, this example highlights the emergence of an orthodoxy around female foeticide in Punjab whereby the relevant official bodies use the tools at their disposal to show that they are actively pursuing the cause.

A similar strategy was adopted in Bhathinda in 2005 where the state government approved a Rs. 75 crore project under the Rural Health Mission in which anyone giving a clue about female foeticide offenses would be given an award of Rs. 5000. The encouragement of 'decoys' to place checks on clinics, doctors and individuals was this campaign's specific feature in addition to the recruitment of doctors into government positions engaged in anti-female foeticide activities. Both the Bhathinda and Nawanshahr cases show approaches informed and guided by a technological and managerial form of governance. Both campaigns follow a line of deterrence rather than prevention. Underlying them both, however, is the belief that it is possible to track, manage and contain female foeticide through systems and tools of governance upheld by official discourses of action.

SCHEMING AGAINST FEMALE FOETICIDE: VIEWS FROM THE BANDWAGON

This orthodoxy can also be surmised from an interview I did with the PNDT Programme Officer of the Punjab Department of Health and Family Welfare Department in Chandigarh in 2006. When I approached him with an opening question on his assessment of the success of government anti-sex selection campaigning, he responded

with an assertive hostility toward the idea of inquiry or research on the topic of sex selection:

> You don't have to ask anyone for information. They all know. I have all of the information right here (pointing to his desk and computer).What can you say that no one doesn't already know?

It became clearer during the course of the half-hour interview that the PNDT officer was expressing a number of different frustrations. His high rank within the bureaucracy as the director of the PNDT programme meant that he felt he needed to assert the authority reflecting the position from which he spoke in his government office. What he saw as the pivotal position of both Punjab and Indian national governments' role was clearly upheld as the driving force behind any raised awareness or visible improvements to the foeticide emergency in Punjab:

> Who is bringing the change? Is it NGOs? Krishan Kumar (DC of Nawanshahr)? Or the government?? Who is giving these women a voice? It is *our* (the government) efforts. There is (a) problem, not created by government … it is deep-rooted … whether we are improving or remaining at status quo … Had we done nothing, it (the sex ratio) would have been 760. However, now it is more than 800.

The sense of hostility expressed by the officer toward the Nawanshahr model as an individual publicity stunt was made clear. More significantly, perhaps, the tone of the interview seemed to be set from the moment I walked into his office. Perhaps being sensitive to status, rank and gender within government offices in India, I immediately could sense how 'out of place' I seemed. As the interviewer, I appeared (at least initially to myself!) to hold the power of the questioning, yet the interviewee made certain that I knew my place as younger to him and as a woman, despite the fact our age difference could not have been much more than ten years.

> Young girls like you are trying to find out what we already know. We are doing the job. We have all of the resources to find the culprits. It just takes time.

After being called a 'young girl', being told that I was naive in my questioning and that I showed my lack of knowledge on foeticide by not having the data (i.e. census) 'at my fingertips' as he did, I was able to interview the officer about his department's activities, though with limited leeway. What seemed to be of great concern to him was the fact that the government is often highlighted as the cause of the problem of female foeticide:

> Have we created the sex ratio? No. We are the ones helping. It is because of us that people are thinking about it. So how can people so quickly blame government for all that is wrong?

The comments about sex-selection from this officer perhaps show more than anything the extent to which he bears the brunt of pressure from around him to show improving results at the state level sex ratio for the central government and other bodies. His desire to find patterns and culprits as identified through his work on the PNDT Act revealed the inability to think outside of the tools of colonial discourse. Where caste had been the unit of analysis for the British colonial administration, the contemporary administrations in India have religion and 'anti-woman' practices at their fingertips as an explanatory tool. Thus, the use of religion and culture to identify patterns largely ignores the intersectional nature of social processes including caste, class, gender or region, thus producing problematic, sweeping generalizations:

> In 2001 it was Sikhs who did it mostly. It is dangerous to say this publicly… This (female foeticide) is more of a social crime which has three tiers: family, ultrasound and abortionists. There is no complainant in the public. By wisdom and guesswork of who is doing it we are tracking the culprits.

The position of male patriarchal authority from which this officer spoke was one which merely represented the dominant, hegemonic discourse on female foeticide of the time. Such statements are behind the numerous proclamations and campaigns delivered by the ministry in which his office is based. The authority of the PNDT programme is channelled through the enforcement of law. As the officer stated:

> You have to see the fear of law. There are ninety doctors' cases pending. We have created (a) fear of law to the extent possible… We have developed a clear-cut strategy to break the chain between the family, the scan clinics and the abortionists and doctors. For greed and money, they can commit murder. We have not stopped it though, but we have definitely curbed it by making people afraid.

I walked away from this interview with a picture of a particular bureaucratic perspective on social campaigning which, from its haughty position, is removed and condescending toward the communities it speaks about. The law is upheld as the protector of women's rights, while also being the tool with which the state maintains its moral authority over its citizens. However, what was brought out in the interview was that this approach has little space for critical engagement, suggestions from interest groups or dialogue with communities. Social activism has had to operate within this appropriated orthodoxy of female foeticide discourse also attempting to operate outside of it. On a very simplistic level it was possible to agree with the officer that female foeticide needs to be addressed, but according to his perspective, this needed to be done from *within* the patriarchal management of the discourse, and not as a rejection of it. The interview reminded me so vividly of many other conversations I have had over the years with older men holding status or positions of privilege whether in terms of family standing, profession or class,

posing swirling questions and counter-questions within my mind: Who am I to question paternal authority, particularly that of a male government officer who claims to know best? How could he so crudely speak in such a manner which not only lacked reflexivity but which also was unwilling to hear anything other than support for the 'official perspective' which his office was promoting? What often shapes such conversations is the insecurities of these men with their position at the helm of a sinking ship of socially inequitable development. Or perhaps it is that they feel threatened that younger women are questioning the very structures that continue to claim to be paternally benevolent but which have generated social realities of discrimination and gender inequity such as the declining sex ratio in contemporary Punjab. It was clear that the officer was not merely reacting or responding to me. Before me, there had been other young women entering his office, wanting information or support in producing research or journalistic pieces on the topic. To him, such efforts were futile in his crusade to end female foeticide. The state is by no means a gender neutral space and thus needs to be understood for the structures of power that it supports and those aspects of society which it does not support. From this conversation, it is no wonder that women's voices have been unable to penetrate government discourse more profoundly.

The PNDT officer's comment that 'The culprits are "out there", not us' was also a commentary on the defensiveness of many government servants who feel that they are the object of criticism from many different elements in society. While the state carries on with its efforts to show that it is attempting to raise awareness about the issue of female foeticide, it seemed clear that, in attempting to reflect a voice of authority, that the officer needed to speak from the position of a 'man', and had a clear objective of pointing toward a group or groups in order to be able to identify at least one of the 'culprit' communities. While government discourses on female foeticide show the strong currents of (male) paternalistic authority, the campaigns show a range of different interpretations of how to operationalize this paternalism, spanning from humiliation and punitive actions toward the 'culprits' to overt victimized characterizations of the 'girl child' in gaining sympathy for the cause. However, many more examples exist which show the numerous efforts to counter the negative connotations of the girl child. The Chandigarh Union Territory Administration took its own steps in preparing a long-term action plan in 2008 toward sensitization and consciousness-raising around female foeticide. While the action plan contained similar dimensions of 'tracking' and 'targeting' as in Nawanshahr, it seemed more successful in branching its activities toward partnerships with other agencies. The 'sensitization' entailed collaboration with educational institutions, government agencies, NGOs, religious leaders, the media, arts groups and other agencies. However, one of the key features of the Chandigarh Administration's campaign also contains the use of information technologies in maintaining birth and medical records, issuing a card at the time of birth, maintaining records of school enrolment and health and educational milestones of young girls.

The approach of the Chandigarh Administration embraces the technologies of governance while trying to extend its influence in doing outreach work with NGOs, colleges and other agencies in passing on the message of anti-foeticide. Participating colleges and schools, for instance, held events on their premises in showing their commitment to the cause. Government College for Women in Chandigarh, for instance, held a day-long function, which, along with banners and speeches, also included a pledge for each individual student to make that they would not commit female foeticide when pregnant in the future. The programme seemingly had a consciousness about the hegemonic model of other anti-foeticide campaigns and thus attempted to chart out its own path in the way in which the programme was designed. As the officer of the projected is quoted:

> [T]he blue print of this Action Plan said that despite relative prosperity, the tendency to view the girl child as a burden and a liability is assuming critical proportions. She said that the Chandigarh Administration's concern is not just improving the sex-ratio at birth but also to focus on the 0–6 age group which is critical for advances in health care and nutrition. Our model goes beyond the expectant mother or her infant daughter. It focuses further on the child's early health care and nutrition and looks at education as a vehicle to economic self-reliance. She said that the Chandigarh Model will act as a beacon of hope, for it is gender sensitive and participatory in nature. It is non-intrusive and accords primacy to the dignity of women. It builds on the inter-connectedness between enforcement, education and empowerment strategies. We shall work to ensure the survival of unborn girls and a life of dignity and self-reliance for our daughters.

So, while the Chandigarh Administration was actively promoting its programme of indoctrinating anti-female foeticide at an inter-sectoral level, the plan also suggested certain 'empowerment' strategies through financial incentives, another dimension to anti-foeticide activism more widely in India. The incentives under the Chandigarh plan were set for certain milestones in a girl's life: the time of birth, immunization, enrolment into school and passing secondary school examinations. Thus, the 'nurturing' of the girl child in the Chandigarh Administration's plan of action had a multi-tiered approach, including tracking, targeting, protecting and finally nurturing the girl child as a preventative strategy toward female foeticide. This marked a rather different approach to the reprimanding lens of the Nawanshahr Model.

Another financial incentive scheme was developed in Delhi in 2008 called the 'Ladli scheme' which was set up as Delhi Union Territory government's attempt to show its commitment to fighting female foeticide. The financial burden associated with girl children and the payment of dowries was played upon by the Ladli scheme by offering a model within which to view daughters as economic assets which reap benefits in the form of a savings scheme. The Chief Minister of Delhi at the time, Sheila Dikshit under

the approval of the Delhi cabinet had negotiated a high interest rate for fixed deposits with a leading Indian bank to promote the Ladli scheme in the name of the girl child. To qualify for the scheme girls had to be born in Delhi on or before 1 January 2008, and the parents of the child could not earn a yearly income of more than 1 lakh. The amount would be deposited in the name of the girl child at different stages of her life as a means of accumulating a lump sum of 1 lakh (100,000 rupees) that would become accessible on the girl's eighteenth birthday. The government would contribute Rs. 10,000 on the birth of the girl child, followed by Rs. 5,000 deposits each on her admission to Class One, Five, Nine, Ten and Twelve.

The term 'ladla' is quite affectionately and often jokingly used to describe boys who are spoiled by their parents and relatives. Thus, 'ladli' similarly denotes a girl who is doted upon by her parents and relatives. The popular conception of 'ladla' is one of affection, of a boy or son who is doted upon by his parents, in particular, the mother. The notion of 'ladli' (spoiled girl child) in northern India is one which does not circulate within popular terminology, though it certainly does have currency within the middle to upper middle classes of contemporary India, particularly as the raising of children becomes increasingly commodified. In fact, 'ladli' has quite a clear place within the increasing consumer pressures of childrearing, class positioning and consumption in which even the girl child provides opportunities to show one's wealth through enrolment in status-conscious private schooling and conspicuous spending on clothing, technology and other 'class accessories'. This is a contradictory set of processes which are at the forefront of the anti-foeticide spectacle in Punjab. On another level, the emotional tagging of female foeticide has captured the imagination of the general public, especially for those who are literate, who cannot escape the tentacles of the countless billboards appearing on streets and on the backs of buses, carrying slogans to 'save the girl child' in Punjab and across India. What is perhaps most effective of the strategic use of such campaigns and in the use of the term 'ladli' is that they tap into the cultural sensibilities of the society in which such policies and discourses circulate.

Policy research on female foeticide has produced some insightful commentary on how female foeticide operates through cultural practices and in the shaping of wider social trends. Where media releases give snapshot anecdotal evidence and overarching sex-ratio data to create a scenario of the scale of female foeticide, the NGO think-tank Institute for Development and Communication in Chandigarh has been prolific in building up a databank of a wide range of evidence of gender imbalances and gender violence in Punjab. However, it is problematic to even attempt to make a separation between NGO and government knowledge on female foeticide, as it is not uncommon for studies and reports, such as the IDC's 2002 publication *Identifying and Controlling Female Foeticide and Infanticide in Punjab*, to be co-sponsored and funded by various government departments, in this case including the Department of Women and Child Development and the Government of India Ministry of Human Resources Development. Thus, it is not merely about the types of knowledge which are being produced, as was discussed

in Chapter 1, on son preference and female foeticide but also about how these types of knowledge contribute to anti-foeticide activist discourse. The cycle of discovery, investigation, research, evidence-based policy recommendations, anti-female foeticide campaigns and then private and public reactions all make up the circulatory process which has come to comprise the contemporary public discourse on anti-female foeticide. However, in addition to these reports and campaigns exist many other engagements which too find a voice in the broad spectrum of acts and actions of anti-female foeticide activism.

REWRITING THE SCRIPTS OF ANTI-FEMALE FOETICIDE

It is at the cultural level that we see some of the most radical, transformational statements on anti-female foeticide and gender relations more generally. Where government policy can only operate within its own limited terrain of devising new schemes to convince the 'natives' to abandon sex selection, this is often done through the use of reifying cultural stereotypes of the victimhood of the girl child through a rather rigid reading of culture. A dynamic space of cultural activism has produced new interpretations which have resounded beyond the scope of pronouncements, stereotypical images and top-down policies in expressing new possibilities for gender futures. A workshop, held in 2005 at Punjab University's Regional Resource Centre and Adult and Continuing Education department in Chandigarh, brought together Hindi and Punjabi poets and writers on the theme of life stories. A mixed array of poems, fictional and semi-biographical or semi-autobiographical stories were presented, which saw a complex set of questions and issues emerge around people's perceptions of contemporary gender realities and what alternative gender futures might be conceptualized. One poem written by Shashi Prabha called *Main Hoon Naa* (*I Am Here*) presents the voice of the unborn daughter in dialogue with her mother, in quelling her doubts and anxieties about the possibility of giving birth to a girl:

'Don't cry, mother	'Ro mat maan,
I am here,'	Main hoon naa,'
Said the girl in the womb,	Garb kee bachchee ne kahaa,
'I will dry your tears,	'Main tumhaare aansoo sokh loongee,
I will give you your sense of being.'	Tumhe tumhaare hone kaa ahsaas to doongee.'

(translated from Hindi by the author and Rabeea Khan)

The poems which were presented at the workshop by the writers themselves generated a discussion about the politics of language and terminology as well as the types of messages which writers and activists should be using and developing when writing on such themes as son preference and gender discrimination. A follow-up five-day

writers' seminar held in 2006 took this further in pushing the agenda of formalizing a vocabulary on son preference and female foeticide which did not fall into the traps of using the same language adopted by the media and government agencies, which, it was unanimously agreed, was both patronizing toward women and girls while also lacking any transformational gender politics. One of the overarching themes was of the need to develop a notion of 'living relationships' which, as one of the seminar organizers, Rama Rattan, an eminent social and Punjabi cultural activist in Chandigarh-Mohalli, points out, that these are the contexts within which women's and men's aspirations and expectations about life, family and the future are experienced.

> [L]iving relationships are not just about the institution of marriage. It [marriage] is not infallible, and women's identities need to be viewed beyond their desires, hopes and dreams within this institution… These stories [from the seminar proceedings] are ones to be thought about, not just read.

While writers' circles, to an outsider, may seem an aloof setting for such discussions to take place, the impact and repercussions that these two seminars made upon media reporting on female foeticide thereafter was strong-felt. The attendance at the second workshop by journalists, novelists, poets and social activists no doubt contributed to this. However, this is not to say that the same patronizing commentaries in the print media did not continue to carry on as before. As was commented on during the workshop, women and girls continued to be fixed within the domain of either the household or institutions of marriage in the streams of newspaper articles on female foeticide, whether as mothers, daughters, mothers-in-law, or daughters-in-law. What the workshops marked, quite significantly, was the overt encouragement of new expressions of opposition to female foeticide offering a broadening approach toward gender relations rather than one fixated upon the foeticide spectacle and the 'traditional' patriarchal household unit. A prose piece entitled *Pachchtaanvaan* (*Repentance*) shows a character development more complex than the usual victimized stories seen in the media, which offers readers a route to an alternative possibility to the more clichéd scenarios of uni-dimensional stereotypical victim-perpetrators:

> Auntie's daughter-in-law gave birth to twins. Their mother nursed the boy with her own milk but the girl was completely neglected. Auntie gave formula milk to the girl and looked after her. The boy became healthy but the girl became thin. She became very weak. But the mother did not care, and the girl died. Obviously she was going to die.
>
> I went last year, and the same little girl's mother said "Bibi, you have a granddaughter. Look at her play. Bibi, it seems to me that the same daughter has come…" While saying this, she choked up. I looked at her with both surprise and delight.

> Bhuaa dee nahu de ghar jaurhe janme. Munde noon taan maan ne dudh piaaiaa par kurhee pooree tarhaa teaag ditee. Bhuaa oparaa dudh piaa ke kurhee noon paalanh lagee. Mundaa taan palardaa gayaa. Par kurhee sukdee gaee. Sokrhaa pai gayaa kurhee noon. Par maan noon taras naa aaiaa. Kurhee mar gayee. Mar hi jaanhaa see uhne. Pichchle saal main gaee taan, kurhee dee ohee maan kahindee:
>
> 'Beebee, potree hoee. Aah vekh kheddee paee. Beebee, mainoon taan inj lagdaa, ohee meree dhee aa gaee e…' Kahindee daa ohdee galaa bhar aaiaa. Main hairaanee te khushee naal ohdaa mooh vekhanh lagg paee.
>
> By Sukhwant K. Mann
> [translated from Punjabi by the author and Rabeea Khan]

These expressions are part of a wide body of published work, whether in print or on the internet, which are voicing concerns, opinions and suggestions showing tension, emotion, guilt, doubt and even the possibility of repentance and change in people's thoughts and actions. Both of these poems represent women-centred scenes in which different generations of females are engaging with one another about both the pressures that they feel about producing a son while also showing solidarity with one another in standing up against these pressures. There is certainly a feminist thread running across these two pieces in this respect. The discourse on son preference within such writings seems to operate on another plane from that of the government campaigns earlier discussed. However, it might be said that the popular discursive terrain on son preference is being shaped by such activities as the writers' workshops which have a formal, public status inasmuch as they are reported in newspapers, are attended by certain public figures and, as an event, generate a spectacle within themselves. The influence of such events has been felt since then, on media reportage, poetry, story-writing, school activities and NGO activity where tones and perspectives reflecting transformational, feminist politics have seeped into anti-foeticide acts and activism, less concerned with irking the officers at the helm of the institutionalized anti-foeticide drive.

One of the writers in attendance, Dr Gurminder Kaur Sidhu, is a practising paediatrician, who had an inventory of first-hand experiences and correspondence on son preference and childbirth with the public. Her book *Naa! Mami, Na!* (*No, Mummy, No!*) attracted much attention in terms of the insights it presented about contemporary Punjabi society and its engagements with the medical management of childbirth and son preference. As a vocal pro-girl child rights activist, she is explicit about how she dealt with the numerous requests for medical assistance in committing foeticide and talks about the cases in which she was successful, and others in which she was unsuccessful, in this crusade. The book is a compilation of letters from patients, appreciators of her activism in promoting the 'girl child's' survival, patient diary notes and a playscript with the title of the book *Naa! Mami, Naa!*

However, to limit the sphere of cultural engagement and critique to the literary realm would be misleading. Social commentary on son preference and female foeticide are widespread in contemporary Punjab and can no longer be contained to a particular context, urban or rural, to particular classes of people or even to a particular mode of thinking. The messages of anti-foeticide, many of which do not necessarily go as far as articulating anti-son preference, circulate through many different circuits. One significant example is that of the celebration of the festival of Lohri. Since 2006 the celebration of Lohri in Punjab has brought with it a certain shift in the public discourse on the observance of the 'son'. *Lohri* occurs around the middle of January, most often on 13 January. The multiple stories about *Lohri* have different messages of commemoration and celebration to be told. Its emergence as a 'son' festival cannot be specifically located, apart from its reflection of the popular culture in which it is celebrated and the elevated value put upon sons. The post-2006 reinterpretation of *Lohri* needs to be seen within this lens of reinterpretation and change. There are multiple stories of the origins of Lohri in any case. The celebration marks the end of the winter season (Poh) and the beginning of the pre-spring season (Maagh) in the *desi* (Punjabi) calendar when the sun changes its course. The festival thus contains a celebration of sun and fire, hence the bonfires which have become a central part of the rituals of *Lohri.* Many interpretations of Lohri begin with the tale of Dulla Bhatti, a bandit who lived during the time of the Mughal Emperor Akbar (AD1542–1605). He was a Robin Hood sort of figure who not only took from the rich and gave to the poor, but, as folklore tells it, saved girls from being captured and sold into the slave market. His rescuing of Punjabi girls from abduction and in betrothing them to suitable matches while also providing their dowries has made him a legend. Thus, Dulla Bhatti is seen as a hero in Punjabi folklore and as such, when boys and young men go from house-to-house singing the chants of *Lohri*, people give them sugar, sesame seeds, popcorn, peanuts and sugarcane, in addition to money. It is generally seen as inauspicious to turn away someone without giving them something. *Lohri* is celebrated ritualistically in people's homes through the creation of an image of the goddess of *Lohri* with cattle dung which is then decorated and set alight while chants are sung. Following the lighting of the bonfire at sunset, people toss sugar-sweets, sesame seeds and *reorhi* (sugar or jaggery coated with sesame seeds) into the fire until it dies out. Many people even take the embers home with them as an auspicious memento of the celebration.

The gratitude which is mimicked in the songs and tales of Lohri to Dulla Bhatti for saving the girls of Punjab says just as much about the appreciation of daughters as that of having sons. Yet, Lohri evolved as a celebration of the idea of the 'son', until of course, very recently. As a construction over time which came out of a long history of storytelling, interpretation and reinterpretation, Lohri as a festival has come out of a merging of a hegemonic culture of son valuation with a deification of this. Another folklore tradition speaks of two sisters, Lohri and Holika. While Holika (Holi) died in the fire of Holi, Lohri survived. Hence, eating sesame seeds and *reorhi* is seen as an integral part of

the ritualistic marking of the day in addition to burning a bonfire, sitting or standing around it while singing Lohri songs. Some even say that the word Lorhi is derived from a shortening of *til* (sesame seeds) and *reorhi* (jaggery) to become *tilohri* and then Lohri, for short. Even in this telling, Lohri seems to have all of the elements of a more women-centred if not feminist celebration. Despite this, the resilience of the son-preferring, patriarchal interpretations of Lohri have persisted, though until very recently there have been signs of people embracing its women-focused roots. The recent shift which has seen waves of people openly celebrating Lohri for their daughters or granddaughters, alongside that for sons and grandsons, became a point by which couples and families could make a statement about anti-foeticide. As one of the recurring tenets of the various anti-foeticide campaigns has been to avail any opportunity to value the girl child, Lohri has been capitalized upon by some segments of society in Punjab, though still within a predominantly urban middle- to upper-middle-class remit. However, I would go as far to say that the recent assertion and celebration of Lohri for daughters and granddaughters in Punjab marks an act of cultural engagement which should be celebrated, despite its limitations. It could also be included within our conception of anti-foeticide activism. This chant, which has been rewritten for this new wave of celebrating girls' lohri has become increasingly popularized as each Lohri has passed since 2006:

Girls' Lohri

Halle nee maiyee halle
do beri patte jhulle
do jhul payeaan khajurran
khajurran suttya meva
es munde de ghar mangeva
es munde di voti nikdi
oh! khandi choori, kutdi
Kut! Kut! Bharaya thaal woti bave nanaanaa naal
Nanaan te wadi parjaee
So kudma de ghar aayee!

Chant: chorus:
mein lohri lain aayee!

Two berry leaves are hanging
Two date leaves are also hanging
The tree shed the fruit
There's an engagement in this boy's house
This boy's wife is short
She eats and grinds choori [a punjabi dish]
She grinds and grinds and fills the plate! the wife sits with her sisters-in-law

Sister-in-law and the elder son's wife
Are in their in-laws' house.

Chant:
I have come to take my Lohri

The act of inviting relatives and friends to a *beti di lohri* (daughter's *lohri*) could be seen as an act of activism, however small it may seem within the larger picture. Formal registers of knowledge cannot begin to comprehend the impact that such movements represent in the face of the quantitative data which shows very little or no change. When the celebration of girls' *lohri* becomes popularized and not seen as out of the ordinary or as an oppositional act, it will become more clear that cultural activism has been successful in challenging son preference from its branches if not more fundamentally from its roots. It also leads us to take expressions of reformation and change more seriously as potentially having considerable impacts upon discourses on son preference and gender, more than even the most ambitious anti-foeticide programmes and campaigns can have.

ANTI-FOETICIDE AND FEMINIST NETWORKS

One of the constraints for formulating alternative discourses has been the co-optation by the government of the anti-foeticide platform. Void of any feminist or activist elements of social transformation, the state's version of anti-foeticide activism has been dominated by a language of governance, discipline and punishment. However, despite this dominance, there is a plethora of examples of organic voices of challenge and response which are making ripples in a widening array of acts and expressions in Punjab. Anti-foeticide activism in India has formulated itself around a number of different dynamics of protest and assertion. Groups such as CEHAT, SAMA and Jagori are groups based in Mumbai and Delhi which have been at the forefront of anti-foeticide activism since the 1980s. While some of the acts or examples of anti-foeticide discussed so far may appear on some levels to be engaged with the localities they operate in, there are a number of issues that I have raised which point us to the need for more critical approaches to anti-foeticide activism.

The internet cannot be underestimated for its capacity for generating awareness, sensitization and politicization, often well beyond the remit of such circumscribed approaches such as the Chandigarh, Delhi and Nawanshahr examples in the previous section. The web has been used in a rather limited manner in Punjab to promote anti-foeticide, though the volume of 'naming and shaming' media articles and of announcements of new schemes on the web is abundant. This section will branch out of Punjab and examine the case for feminist 'internet-works' as a potential space for the bridging of activism in different contexts and in a more critical engagement with anti-foeticide activism more generally. The ether space provides an important interface for

anti-sex selection activism, as I have explored elsewhere. While the use of the internet by feminist groups and organizations, or feminist 'internet-works' (Purewal 2004), has become an invaluable component to political organizing globally, it is not yet clear whether or to what extent this has had an impact upon Punjab and conscientization around female foeticide. Internet-based networking as a method of political organizing has presented possibilities for solidarity-building across groups, organizations, communities in India and globally and could potentially be a way in which individuals and organizations can build networks in Punjab as well as globally in the diaspora. The internet has a tremendous potential to bridge the small and large acts of consciousness and activism around son preference, female foeticide and other gender interests which can benefit local perspectives in offering opportunities to share ideas, information and network with other individuals, groups and organizations. Punjab, given its absorption of technological innovation, could and should be a centre of this kind of internet-working.

Women's organizations have been utilizing the internet for consolidating their lists of contacts and affiliations since its inception, and the manner in which they have done so has often enabled the transformation of contacts into networks promoting feminist agendas. The organization of workshops, hosting of online chat rooms, publicizing of data and research, circulation and signing of petitions and the distribution of news reports relating to gender and feminist activity have been some of the ways that the internet has been used by women's organizations. The internet has enabled many organizations to overcome or even to sidestep geographical and political national border restrictions upon communication, making it an indispensable tool for feminist organizing.

The potentials for the internet to overcome barriers of communication can be illustrated in the numerous social movements and e-democracy initiatives around the world which have utilized such technologies to mobilize campaign and publicize their activities to a wider political community. That the internet is a more egalitarian electronic meeting ground has been espoused by some feminists who have claimed that the internet has provided a medium through which women and other subordinated groups can communicate and create collective networks (Spender 1995). Some 'cyberfeminists' have gone as far as to counter the more general observations of masculinist technology and have argued that the internet actually create spaces and possibilities for counter-hegemonic feminist, even gender hybrid (Haraway 1991), discourses and practices not otherwise possible outside of cyberspace (Plant 1998). On the other hand, the limited monitoring of content and information flows on the internet has also seen the exponential increase of pornography and an unsolicited medium for sexual harassment, showing how such technologies have also enabled other less progressive possibilities. Further, ensuing debates regarding equitability of access, language and representation of voice through the internet have raised questions as to how egalitarian the internet actually is (Jordan 2001). In this respect, claims that the internet is in fact a 'women's medium' (Turkle 1995; Spender 1995) have continued alongside critical questions about disparities of

proliferation and dissemination of information technology between 'developed' and 'developing' countries (Sardar 1996).

The internet has impacted upon the methods of political organizing that have evolved since the inception of the worldwide web and email. Many non-governmental organizations (NGOs), women's organizations and other civil society groups have utilized the internet for making contact with individuals and other organizations in disseminating information about their aims and activities. The internet has facilitated political activism and action for those women who have access to networked facilities by allowing them to communicate across vast distances through a medium which is relatively cheap and effective as a communication tool (Birke and Henry 1993; Rogers 2003). There have been a plethora of websites set up by women's organizations, namely since the period following the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995 which was the first UN world conference to actively promote the use of online information access and communication. References to science and technology in the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1999) acknowledge that science and technology affect women's lives in many different areas. The Platform for Action makes recommendations for women's groups, NGOs, governments, development institutions and private-sector organizations to take various types of steps to direct science and technology policies and development programmes toward goals aiming for gender equality. OFAN (The Once and Future Action Network) is an international network which has been active in highlighting the negative impacts which technologies have upon the lives of women. It has been particularly vocal in lobbying at international conferences, focusing upon potentials for redirecting scientific innovation to promote gender equality and pointing out women's contributions to the fields of science and technology. Initially set up as a formal network, OFAN now operates informally, facilitating dialogue across women's groups and NGOs through their website (www.wigsat.org/ofan/ofan).

The use of the internet by NGOs, however, has been a relatively recent trend. For example, of the 83 NGOs registered for a regional intergovernmental meeting on the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action in the Asia and Pacific region, 68 had an email address, compared to four years earlier at the 1995 conference when practically no participating NGOs had an email contact (AWORC 2000). The expansion of access to the internet by women's organizations needs, of course, to be understood within the context of the period from the mid-1990s onward when, alongside the spread of internet and email access, there was a simultaneous increase in the NGO sector globally. The internet has since become an indispensable tool for such organizations to maintain sustained activity and to remain in contact with other feminist and women's organizations, as well as with donors. The rise of both NGOs and the internet reflect aspects of some of the decentralizing processes of globalization, at least in terms of the articulation of political identity and social activism. The internet has thus become a central feature of many networks, for which email and the worldwide web have facilitated dialogues between and across various interests in building dialogues.

Just as access to sex-selective services are available over the internet, so too is information about anti-female foeticide. Ironically, when using a search engine to find media articles on female foeticide activism and campaigns, the automatic keyword-induced advertising mechanism kicks in to offer the viewer a list of sex-selective and pre-selective clinics offering a range of private state-of-the-art services from clinics around the world. The internet is also a place where websites and organization challenge and oppose sex selection. The websites of various campaigns provide examples of how networks can be developed in a virtual setting, connecting otherwise dispersed interest groups and individuals, here referred to as 'internet-works'. Internet-works, as illustrated in this section, draw upon the worldwide web as both a medium for organizing and a source of information. Not all organizations collaborating with these networks are overtly 'feminist' in their overall approaches. The maximum commonality that many offer is an alignment with the stance of anti-female foeticide. In this section, three organizations will be examined specifically in terms of their networking activities relating to sex selection. The internet-based network, Global Reproductive Health Forum (GRHF)/ BOL, and two Indian organizations, the Datamation Foundation and CEHAT (Centre for Enquiry into Health and Allied Themes) have all used the internet to generate a critical discussion of female foeticide. Each, however, has its own approach and has contributed to the forging of internet-works in its own way.

The Global Reproductive Health Forum@ Harvard (GRHF) is a project set up by the Harvard School of Public Health. The GRHF was initiated in the mid-1990s as an internet networking project to encourage discussions about gender and reproductive health. It is supported by a vast state-of-the-art web-based research library, an e-newsletter and journal, and several electronic discussion forums. The electronic discussion list BOL, one of GRHF's discussion forums, has been moderated by the Centre for Women's Development Studies (CWDS) library in Delhi since 2000. BOL disseminates information about a range of gender issues including research projects, funding opportunities, gender and women's studies, judicial decisions and campaign information, to name a few. One of the most topical reproductive health-related issues in the South Asian region has been the worsening sex ratio, and in this context, BOL has been instrumental in facilitating the outcry against female foeticide to a national and international level. The e-discussion list has circulated newspaper articles and references to newly published resources on female foeticide to those on the e-list. The collation and consolidation of such information has contributed to a significantly raised awareness of foeticide which has gone far beyond the rhetorical reference to census statistics. It has supplemented the statistical evidence through local reports and commentary on individual cases and legal limitations to tackling female foeticide.

One of the most notable topics discussed on BOL has been the Pre-Natal Act in India which made illegal the use of ultrasound technology for sex-selection purposes in 1994. However, the continuingly declining sex ratio against females has made it evident that despite the Pre-Natal Diagnostic Techniques Act, those who have wanted to do so

have still been gaining access to such technologies. BOL provided a forum in which various reports and commentaries on foeticide could be publicized in a manner which engaged with populist and journalistic coverage of the phenomenon, while maintaining a commitment to activism and scholarship. Under the subject heading 'Issues of Current Concern', various examples of the continuing violation of the PNDT Act were highlighted by contributors to the discussion list. In one contribution, a local newspaper article from a city in Punjab was reported in which a scanning clinic was found to be offering 'mobile' services. This was being done through the use of a portable ultrasound scanner which, the article pointed out, can be attributed to the increasing access to sex selection even in rural areas. Such a report showed how the ban on the practice of prenatal sex identification has not stopped the services from being offered and bought. In another series of contributions, there was an exchange among several e-discussion subscribers around questions set out by the moderator, with regard to how people perceive societal pressures to 'produce' sons. The dialogue that ensued revealed a mixed reading of patriarchal norms in this respect, largely reflecting academic discourse on the subject. Female foeticide was argued to be the result of heightening economic pressures to have sons. On the other hand, it was seen as part of a wider set of reproductive decisions in which girls are not always unwanted but conversely often desired. Several contributors made references to cases of couples already having one or two sons actually welcoming the birth of daughters.

The information that GRHF/BOL has distributed may not be unique in the sense that the articles and resources tend to be republished from original sources such as newspapers, academic journals, etc. However, the context of the virtual environment and its boundary-less distribution has meant that BOL has been successful in tapping into already-existing networks and organizations committed to issues around gender equality and reproductive health in forging new networks or alliances around female foeticide.

CEHAT is a Mumbai-based health advocacy NGO which has been active in promoting public health in India. CEHAT is the research centre of a Trust whose trustees are all engaged in health activism of some form. CEHAT has been at the forefront of the nation-wide anti-sex selection movement and was instrumental along with other women's and health groups in petitioning the Maharashtra government in the mid-1980s to ban sex-selection tests. This was subsequently taken further to the central government which eventually led to the PNDT Act being passed in 1994.

CEHAT's campaign to ban sex selection has been primarily concerned with legislative measures to make all forms and methods of sex selection illegal. The passing of the PNDT Act in 1994 and then in the amendment of it in 2003 were landmark rulings which were the outcome of CEHAT and other organizations operating in this network of anti-sex selection activists and putting pressure upon state and national governments. CEHAT filed a public interest litigation in 2000 arguing that the PNDT Act of 1994 was neither being enforced nor abided by. The fact that the sex ratio continued to show a declining trend against females was evidence that sex selection was still being practiced. Further,

the original PNDT Act which had the ultrasound scan and fetal abortions in mind when it was compiled was not able to address the more recent pre-selective technologies now available in India. CEHAT was instrumental in both lobbying the government to amend the PNDT Act of 1994 to include pre-selective techniques and putting pressure upon the authorities to prosecute medical practitioners found guilty of providing sex-selective services.

CEHAT's activities show a strong commitment to acting and engaging with local and regional structures in order to get its message across. CEHAT has made use of the internet in publicizing its own activism around the subject. It has its own website where it gives a brief history of the campaign to ban sex selection in India and gives informative data about national, state and local level sex ratios. Existing legislation is explained in a manner which does not assume that legal frameworks necessarily mean an eradication of the practice. Rather, CEHAT's website gives a sense of a continuing campaign not only to ban but to ensure that a social message against the practice is delivered at many levels of society in order to be most effective. CEHAT's activism has in fact been an important component of the BOL e-discussion list, and CEHAT has certainly tapped into BOL's network during its campaign to amend the PNDT.

The Datamation Foundation is another Indian-based NGO which has aimed to publicize the need to promote more gender-sensitive IT projects. It runs a number of programmes around the deployment of ICTs in addressing economic disadvantage and women's empowerment. One of its programmes is the 'Save the Girl Campaign' which was launched as an awareness raising project around the issue of female foeticide.

The Datamation website highlights the negative social impacts of female foeticide and provides a space in which people can petition against medical practitioners partaking in the practice, lobby the government, and access Indian newspaper articles on the subject. A state-wise database of clinics offering sex-selection services is also offered on the site, potentially for activists to boycott or complain against. This is accompanied by a 'pledge to stop female foeticide' which advocates against female foeticide and also accepts donations for distribution to women's groups and Datamation Foundation's anti-sex selection work. More importantly, however, are the Delhi-based network and India-wide network of NGOs working to challenge sex selection. Full contact details are given for each organization to further strengthen the network. The website also has the full written versions of the Pre-Natal Diagnostic Techniques (PNDT) Act and the subsequent PNDT 2003 amendment. Mass email broadcasts on female foeticide are sent to official bodies, medical practitioners and individuals from the campaign website to publicize the issue, and an online complaint tracking and recording system to be operational by partner women's groups, is soon to be operated. Rather bold statements against female foeticide in India are made across the website which clearly state the organization's view that female foeticide breaches social and medical ethics.

The Datamation Foundation can be most easily understood as a social welfare organization focusing its attention upon 'women and the poor' and 'marginalized

communities'. Its underlying aim is to raise awareness about and include women and the poor in the technological shifts going on in society. The approach of the Datamation Foundation falls solidly within the Women in Development (WID) framework which fundamentally believes that the inclusion of women in economic and planning processes will eventually trickle down the benefits to women. Experience has shown that this paradigm does little to challenge existing relations of gender and power. Indeed, more generally, there is a middle-class bias to internet use globally. The use of the internet by NGOs further emphasizes this bias, revealing the limitations of the reach of networks formed via the internet. However, the violent nature of the practice of sex selection and its brutally anti-female implications allows for broad-based, diverse types of activities to coexist within such networks forming a platform for communication. The formation of anti-sex selection internet-works has relied upon the website activities and the networking resources that such campaigns and networks as BOL, CEHAT and Datamation provide.

GRHF/BOL, CEHAT and the Datamation Foundation have taken equally oppositional stances to the practice of sex selection. All three have utilized the internet as a central organizing and publicizing tool in their campaigning against the practice of sex selection. The strategies which have been deployed by the three organizations discussed here fall within the areas that Hamm (2001) identifies in her analysis of NGOs using ICTs to combat violence against women: information sharing; as an educational tool; networking and solidarity building; and providing alternative perspectives to the mainstream media. Communication about the issue of sex selection among organizations and individuals has been facilitated by the use of the internet in this respect. The cross-fertilization of information about sex selection, local experiences, strategic approaches and broader connecting issues has been one of the overriding positive outcomes of the emergence of such internet-works. On the other hand, women's lower level of access to the internet and an increased male presence on the web generally still presents a challenge to the growth of feminist internet activism. Moreover, the middle-class base of internet access raises critical questions around the actual reach of such 'internet-works': is it merely middle-class, urban-based feminists and/or activists speaking among themselves about an issue (sex selection) which they all clearly oppose? This is another orthodoxy which one might identify within discursive practices on anti-sex selection. To what extent do such networks merely represent a consolidation of middle-class, urban feminist networks rather than a new form and method of radical feminist activism?

As such, the application of the internet in the realm of feminist activism does not lead us to any clear indicators of social impact or change. Furthermore, it is no wonder that such an interest in internet activism against sex selection has occurred in India, considering the technological diffusion that has taken place there more widely. Becoming a world centre for the ICT industry and major exporter of highly skilled labour, India is also a fertile place for the consumption of technologies. The markedly discriminatory sex ratio against women therefore merely illustrates how technological capacity still needs to be met with socially equitable development.

Anti-sex selection campaigns in India, both on the ground and on the internet, have collectively guided public discourse and even lobbied the Indian government to take a firmer stance on the issue. The Pre-Natal Diagnostic Techniques (PNDT) Act of 1994 and its amendment in 2003 were the outcomes of the influence that feminist (and medical) networks were able to exert, showing how effective they can be. Indeed, the internet was an important medium through which some of the campaigning and lobbying occurred. Female foeticide through sex selection has been publicly challenged in the Indian context. Where private scanning clinics have profited from son preference by marketing their services to communities for whom sons are viewed as essential, women's groups have been vocal in opposing the practice. The passing of the Pre-Natal Diagnostic Techniques (PNDT) Act in India in 1994 came about largely because of pressure mounted by a petition filed in the Supreme Court through the partnership of women's groups, health and legal activists. Though making it illegal to conduct sex-selective abortions, the PNDT Act was ineffective in practice. It was not until December 2001 that the first case of a diagnostic centre was accused of conducting sex-determination tests despite the continuation of a declining sex ratio in most regions in India. This, however, came after more than a decade of activism against the practice. In the early 1980s a conglomeration of women's and health organizations in Mumbai waged a campaign against the promotion of prenatal sex-detection services and sex-selective abortion. This campaign arose out of the proliferation of diagnostic centres across India in both rural and urban areas, due to what these organizations identified as the medical profession's complicity in the practice. The Forum Against Sex Determination and Sex Pre-Selection has subsequently continued to campaign against prenatal diagnostic techniques and sperm-separation techniques. By targeting the activities of private scanning clinics, such feminist networks have crucially raised awareness about the issue of female foeticide and its roots in social and cultural structures. This has particularly been the case in India where the male bias of sex ratios is a constant reminder of the dire outcomes of son preference and the gender futures that female foeticide will shape.

The internet, however, is not enough of an organizing tool to combat sex selection on its own. Activism still requires individuals and groupings to engage with sex selection on-the-ground, not just in cyberspace. Some of the most difficult barriers to overcome in advocating and promoting social change exist *within communities*, such as class, race, caste or gender inequalities. Thus, 'face-to-face' or 'on-the street' activism is as vital as are exchanges of information via the internet.

NOTES

1. Krishan Kumar soon thereafter was moved to the Department of Education in the Government of Punjab where he subsequently took the post of Director General of School Education.

5 NARRATIVES OF REPRODUCTIVE CHOICE AND CULTURE IN THE DIASPORA

Culturalist notions of South Asian communities vis-à-vis son preference and the availability of sex-selective technologies have only reaffirmed an uncritical notion of these communities as culturally sexist and patriarchal. While son preference certainly does circulate in South Asia and the diaspora, it does not define these communities in totality. To turn the looking glass in the other direction, other male-dominated domains such as the pub in Britain or the workplace and gendered professions in Europe and North America could be viewed as cultural spectacles of male spheres, as they illuminate the particularities of how gendered spaces are created and sustained in the West. Even the question of son preference arises in different forms in the West. For instance, this American saying shows a preference for sons as the first-born child with a sense of the sequential order and preference of the gender of children in its ideal and well wishes:

> First comes love, then comes marriage,
> Then comes [so and so] with a baby carriage.
> I wish you love, I wish you joy,
> I wish you first a baby boy.
> And when his hair begins to curl,
> I wish you then a baby girl. (cited in Steinbacher and Holmes 1985)

By singling out South Asian, and Punjabi, culture for seemingly inherent and underlying son-preferential attitudes, women are denied agency in the choices that exist in their lives. The 'choice' and 'rights' agenda has been at the centre of much of the dialogue within feminist engagements with reproductive health and decision-making. The privileging of a reproductive choice framework is a problematic one in that it fails to acknowledge the ways in which 'race'/ethnicity, gender and class intersect and interact with women's agency in terms of reproduction. Racialized and culturalist discourses

in conjunction with the idea of 'choice' have positioned some women as subjects with agency and others as objects of analysis (Bower 1995). By questioning the 'rights' and 'choice' framework from the onset, this chapter focuses upon the debate incurred by the ultrasound scan in terms of the choices available to South Asian women in Britain. The scan, sex selection and choice have evoked a debate around the ethics and cultural politics which have been framed a deviant 'otherness' which pose further questions to the way in which women's agency and choice have been understood.

The ultrasound scan which, while neither being new nor at the cutting edge of technology, is used extensively and routinely during the pregnancy. Since its introduction in the late 1970s the ultrasound scan has become widely accessible, and the private market for the provision of scanning services has continued to grow on a global scale. The proliferation of the scan has largely been due to the fact that it provides non-invasive diagnostic information, can be operated by non-medically trained staff and, in the interest of some expecting women/couples, has the potential for diagnosing foetal abnormalities as well as the sex of the foetus. Sex selection assisted by the ultrasound scan has allowed for a decision or *choice* to be made as to whether to act on the sex information given by the scan. Accessibility of the ultrasound scan for sex selective, as well as other purposes brings to the fore some of the ethical and political considerations surrounding the use of reproductive technologies. The scan's continued popularity and routinization in pregnancy in many parts of the world reveals the multiple levels of power articulated through the technology (Taylor 1998). My enquiry here, however, is more specifically concerned with how power (medical and patriarchal) and the mediated use of the ultrasound scan construct women and define their choices. The increasingly medicalized experience of pregnancy not only tends to leave many women with fewer choices but the choices themselves have also been mediated through cultural and social understandings of the technologies, here the ultrasound scan, by both the sonographers and women being 'scanned.'

That some women, in the context of certain 'cultural' factors, may have a preference or pressure to have sons, is an issue of direct association with the ultrasound scan. The interviews in this chapter highlight the manner in which the awareness and increasing accessibility to NRTs has altered the ways in which son preference is discussed and been understood publicly and privately. The interviews in this chapter were conducted with women in the West Midlands in Britain from a variety of generations, and from a range of marital and reproductive situations and experiences.

Drawing upon Lisa Bower's analysis of the foetal harm debates, 'Africanism' and the right to choice in the U.S., a similar theoretical argument can be applied to the British context by arguing that the trope of culture has largely informed the mediated application of the ultrasound scan with respect to South Asian women.[1] As this chapter will suggest, there is an acute discrepancy between the assumptions made by medical practitioners about South Asian women's reproductive positionalities and their agency as they perceive it. The intention of this chapter is not to put forward a particular

method of acknowledging 'difference' and diversity with respect to the application of reproductive technologies or the ultrasound scan. What the chapter does aim to do, however, is to argue that culturalist analysis and the reproductive choice discourse can generate contradictory sets of assumptions, requiring a questioning of the gap between the choice and rights frameworks.

FEMINIST ENGAGEMENTS WITH REPRODUCTIVE TECHNOLOGIES

The use of reproductive technologies has continued to catch the attention of social scientists, feminists and activists alike and will no doubt continue to be a source of contention as new technologies continue to be introduced, modified and applied to a range of social contexts (Corea et al. 1985; Wacjman 1991; Edwards 1999; Strathern 1992; Spallone 1997; McNeil et al. 1990; Tong 1997). Debates around the effects of reproductive technologies upon women, gender relations and reproductive activities have broadly framed the concerns highlighted by the various perspectives. Feminist critiques of reproductive technologies, while not united in their views, have been critical in locating both the experiences and theorizations of these technologies in the social structures in which gender relations are embedded. A distinct group have been opposed to any sweeping denunciations of reproductive technologies as, they argue, new technological innovations have offered so many women the opportunity to become biological mothers, and the reproductive choices available to them now have been due not only to technologies of science but also to pressures waged by the women's movement (Petchesky 1987; Stanworth 1987; Boling 1995).

Radical feminist voices, on the other hand, have been particularly disparaging of the development of reproductive technologies as yet another inroad for systematized patriarchal control over women and their bodies (Corea et al. 1985; Hanmer 1985, 1993; Mies 1987; Rowland 1992). However, neither of these loosely banded feminist perspectives has adequately addressed the multidimensional axes of power upon which women's choices have been understood not only within the patriarchal model, but also within the body of mainstream feminist scholarship itself.

WHOSE CHOICE?

'Choice' refers not only to the options available to women but to how these choices are couched and indeed constructed. Who actually has agency in defining the available choices and in making these choices? 'New' reproductive technologies have further invoked such questions through the entrenchment of popular notions of womanhood and femininity within a tightening relationship between science and patriarchal control over women and their reproductive lives. Wacjman (1991) argues that this

has encouraged women to fulfil rather than reject the traditional female role, thus narrowing the options and choices rather than extending them. While one might argue that women have more choices than they may once have had due to the availability of reproductive technologies (donor insemination, in-vitro fertilization treatment, immuno-contraceptives, amniocentesis, to name a few), the socially acceptable roles for women have become more narrowly defined through the experiences of pregnancy and motherhood with sustained and increasing pressure for women to reproduce within socially and scientifically controlled environments. Although the notion of 'choice', as coined during the birth-control movement of the 1960s and 1970s in Western Europe and North America, has endowed many women with more choices and autonomy in reproductive matters, a positive view of reproductive technologies cannot be seen to be representative of the experiences of most or even many women either within the West or in other parts of the world (Rothman 1987). In the United States IVF clinics have sought to attract 'business' from women desperate to become impregnated by their services, which have been found to have frighteningly low 'success' rates (Corea and Ince 1987; Klein 1989) while in so-called Third World countries coercive sterilizations and contraceptive drug experimenting by large pharmaceutical corporations have been important features of many women's encounters with reproductive technology (Akhter 1995). The choices that reproductive technologies offer to women are shaped by the social structures and constructions in which they exist, leading to differential experiences and differing reproductive choices.

In the British context, all women are entitled to be provided with antenatal care under the National Health Service (NHS). This care is generally distributed between a woman's general practitioner and a local maternity hospital where she would receive regular medical examination throughout the duration of the pregnancy. Women identified as 'low-risk' ordinarily have their first scan at 10–12 weeks and the second scan at 18–20 weeks. The ultrasound scan is done by a qualified sonographer who operates the ultrasound equipment and communicates the information from the screen to the clients. It is not until the second scan that the sex of the foetus can be clearly identified, and even this, depending on the position of the foetus at the time of the scan. After the first missed period and other possible early signs of pregnancy, the scan has become a routine ritual of pregnancy in Britain where 'baby's first picture'[2] is one of the important signifiers and markers of the actual pregnancy, giving a previewing of the baby yet to be born. While the detection of foetal abnormalities is the primary purpose of the scan during the first two trimesters, sex identification is also information that many women are interested in knowing.

One widely highlighted effect of the ultrasound scan, in combination with terminations, is sex selection and skewed sex-ratios against females. While there is no evidence to show this in Britain, sex-ratio data available in other parts of the world show the sinister use of the ultrasound scan for the purpose of sex determination and termination of female foetuses.[3] A distinct body of literature on this subject has emerged over the past

two decades as the initial and long-term impacts of sex selection through the facilitation of technology has seen profound changes in demography and gender relations in many parts of the world, with places such as South Asia (India) and East Asia (China) being highlighted for their enthusiastic adoption of the technologies in the context of the ideology of son preference (Das Gupta and Bhat 1997; Sen 1990; Junhong 2001; Dube 1983; Kumar 1983; Kishwar 1995; Wong and Ho 2001; Sudha and Rajan 1999; Patel 1989). These trends hint at the utilization of the scan and sex-selective abortions. Though such statistics are alarming, the juxtaposition of this South Asia-specific data upon the reproductive choices of South Asian women in Britain involves a problematic application of 'othering' or essentializing analyses.[4]

The diversity of women's experiences of the scan and its sex-identifying powers in 'multicultural' Britain poses a set of questions which require a contextualized analysis, just as much as analyses of the South and East Asian contexts, or indeed how 'Western' feminists have engaged with reproductive technologies, require understandings of the social and cultural contexts in which technologies are applied. While there is widespread acknowledgement that women in the so-called First and Third Worlds might experience reproductive technologies differently, the discourses and critiques of reproductive technologies of so-called Western contexts often assume homogeneity and largely focus upon the perceived growing tension between (Western) feminist notions of 'choice' and the dangers of technology further relegating women as 'baby machines' through a tightening relationship science and capitalism. That women differentially experience these technologies, i.e. that their gendered experiences are intersectionally linked to class, 'race', ethnicity and other social distinctions in which they are being applied (Corea et al. 1985), is a comment often made in passing reference but not woven into the theoretical understandings of the very socially embedded locations of the technologies themselves.[5] This 'disclaimer of diversity' has had the net effect of presenting women's experiences in as much of a totalizing light as the very technologies being critiqued. So, for instance, when Strathern (1992) argues the case for kinship analysis of reproductive technologies and presents 'Euro-American kinship systems' as constituted, however loosely, systems of social organization and reproduction, questions are left unanswered as to where (geographically) and who (race, ethnicity, sexuality) are included in these systems. Thus, we are left wondering, with a postcolonial feminist question mark, 'which women?', and, I might add, 'whose kinship?' Would fifth- or sixth-generation African-American men and women or second- or third-generation black and Asian men and women in Europe fall within these systems, according to Strathern? Diasporas present a challenge to such bounded representations (Hall 1990; Clifford 1994; Gilroy 1997), and in this respect they fall between reproductive debates: the dominant discourses of reproduction in the so-called Third World where the population question and its relation to culture has been paramount particularly until the ICPD[6] in 1994; and the 'choice'/'rights' concerns in the debates in the West (Bandarage 1997). 'Other' women or men within these constructions are either excluded or subsumed within generic, universalizing discussions.

As 'post'-colonial subjects South Asian women in the diaspora are neither 'Third World women' nor comfortably seen as 'Western', with the reading that they have an altogether different set of cultural constraints (Narayan 1997; Parmar 1982). Readings of women in the South Asian diaspora continue to negotiate between these two constructions where they can be seen either through the imperatives of development or through the rationalizing discourses of social work and cultural assimilation and accommodation (S. Kalra 1980). The implications of these readings are that they present a picture of South Asian women's reproductive experiences within a framework largely informed by culture rather than by women's agency, feminism or women's movements, as is the case within more mainstream discourses. The utility of the South Asian woman in this respect has allowed for the continued characterization of communities through women as crucial sites for patriarchal oppression (Brah 1996). So, as South Asian women and other ethnicized or culturalized groups are represented through this process of 'othering', the concerns of both the medical establishment and its feminist critics have erected a more exclusive set of concerns or choices which, it is assumed, apply to a seemingly clearly defined set of 'mainstream' women.

New reproductive technologies are highlighted within feminist critiques as evidence of fertility and pregnancy becoming increasingly commodified through the influence of capitalist medical interests. Even where feminist critiques have intervened, the science/capitalism construct has been selectively used to fuel the feminist critique of reproductive technologies while the culture/technology construct has been used to understand black and Asian women's experiences of reproductive technologies, whether it be in so-called developing or diasporic contexts. South Asian women in Britain are a case in point to expose this gap. The positionality of South Asian women in Britain highlights some aspects of this analytical 'double standard' by examining how the cultural interpretations of reproductive technologies, as in studies done on India and China, and the consumer choice dimensions of the application of sex-selective reproductive technologies as applied in so-called Western contexts. While son preference and sex selection may very well be an issue for some or even many women to confront in their reproductive lives, the perception of South Asian women's location within culturalized communities and families leaves them with little agency in terms of the choices available to them. I argue that South Asian women in Britain occupy a space in which neither the medical establishment nor the feminist critics of reproductive technologies have been able to adequately address.

MEDIATED CHOICES

As a woman or couple enter the sonographer's room for the scan, expectations for the production of the ultrasound image exist from both the sonographer and the woman/couple. The sonographer momentarily becomes the caretaker of the baby as its image is projected from the womb to the screen for all present to see. The sonographer is in a

position of authority and power as he/she wields valuable information on the physical development of the foetus whose presentation is subject to a range of both medical and non-medical meanings (Taylor 1998). Normative understandings of what the foetus should look like at this stage inform the sonographer's own depiction of the scan's result as a 'powerful cultural script on natural behaviour for pregnant women and mothers' (Mitchell and Georges 1998). Thus, it is not only necessarily the foetus who is scanned, but also the woman or couple. In *The Birth of the Clinic*, Foucault (1973) argues that the medical gaze is not merely 'the gaze of an observer, but that of a doctor endowed with the power of decision and intervention'. Hence, the gaze of the sonographer can also become part of a crucial mediating process of the scanning experience. That many women might want to know the sex of the foetus is not surprising, given the accuracy of the technology. However, the reasons why many women would want the sex information, or who can have the choice to know and who cannot, is often up to the whim or *gaze* of the sonographer.

The reproductive technologies employed by the National Health Service (NHS) are not free from these considerations. South Asian women's experiences have shown that they are often singled out by sonographers and ante-natal clinics in the NHS, depending on the individual hospital, which often selectively deny the knowledge of the sex of the child during the time of the scan (Purewal 2003). This is on the basis of an assumed link between perceived South Asian ethnicities and preference for sons. Women and couples who appear to be particularly eager to know the sex of the foetus can be either viewed as merely excited or suspiciously calculating about wanting to know the sex information from the scan. The possibilities that South Asian women might abort female foetuses exemplifies the ways in which the race-culture-gender triad is imbricated in the mediation of reproductive 'choice'. Hence, choices are made available to *all* women, depending upon how they are perceived to fit into (or not) normative reproductive behaviour.

Knowledge about expecting (South) Asian clients by medical practitioners in Britain has led to improvised policies in some hospitals to (in)appropriately deal with the issue of son preference and potential sex selection. There is no conclusive evidence for the medical establishment to presume that South Asian couples prefer sons and would act upon this preference to ensure that they had sons. Uneasy about this sensitive subject, local hospitals, with ad hoc practices of information disclosure or non-disclosure, have made an effort to give the appearance of equal treatment of all patients through equality and diversity statements posted on the entrance bulletin board to their reception desks. In one hospital a sign posted in the waiting area of the ante-natal ward on 'sexing your child' reads:

> [T]he sonographer will only be able to tell you the sex of your child within the available given time … it is not always possible to tell the sex of the child depending on the position of the baby at the time of the scan ... no extra time will be spent on this.

This hospital could be said to be covering itself from any potential accusation that it is discriminatory when the sex of the foetus is not revealed. This is also one of the hospitals which has a reputation for discriminately telling the sex of the child depending on the perceived ethnicity of patients.

One woman commented on her experience of wanting to know the sex of the foetus upon the time of the scan:

> I wanted to know the sex of my child just to know for myself. I didn't care if it was a boy or girl, just that it was healthy. But the person who did the scan didn't tell me because she said it was hospital policy not to tell.

Ironically, this hospital does not have a policy of not disclosing the sex information at the time of the scan, and therefore the refusal to tell the sex of the foetus, it could be presumed, was up to the individual decision of the sonographer. A non-South Asian French woman who went to a different hospital which did have a blanket policy of non-disclosure tells:

> I was told that they wouldn't tell me the sex of the child because there were so many Asian patients who visited the hospital. I couldn't believe they would not tell everyone just because of what they thought some people might do if they were told.

The approach by this hospital is not uncommon in other large South Asian catchment areas in Britain where some hospitals have chosen to go along the path of blanket non-disclosure as opposed to selective denial of disclosure, though with many hospitals offering the information openly to everyone. That both of these women individually would have opted to know the sex of the child (if they were given the choice) is by no means representative of either the sample of women interviewed here or of wider constituencies of women. Many women simply do not wish to know the sex of the foetus until the time of the birth as, to quote one respondent in this study, it is 'a wonderful surprise at the end of long, dark tunnel'. However, this preference needs to be couched within a wider discourse of choice which should not be seen to be discriminatorily prescriptive to choices of women of different class, culture, ethnic and racial backgrounds whose own particular choices do not necessarily reflect their perceived locations. Similarly, the 'performance' of the scan plays out a dominant discourse of pregnancy and motherhood not only along racial or ethnic 'difference' but also along lines of class, reproductive history, lifestyle and personal habits (Mitchell and Georges 1998: 112).

The information about the health, formation and development of the foetus that pre-natal imaging techniques provide is something that not all embrace with equal enthusiasm. There are ethical considerations around detected foetal abnormalities, for instance, and decisions to abort on the basis of the information provided by the ultrasound scan (Santalahti et al. 1998; Wertz and Fletcher 1998; Novaes 2000). The identification of the sex of the foetus is another bit of information that the ultrasound

scan bestows upon reproducing communities. The choice or opportunity to know the sex of the child does not necessarily imply that other choices, i.e. sex-selective abortions, once the sex of the foetus is revealed will automatically follow. An advertisement by a Harley Street private ultrasound clinic promotes its services by stating that:

> early knowledge of baby's sex gives couples plenty of time to decide on the newcomer's name and the colour of its clothes! Parents rejoice if it is the sex they are hoping for, and if not it gives them time to accept the newcomer to the family. (*Eastern* Eye, Friday 29 March 2002)

This particular advertisement sidesteps many of the controversial attacks that have been aimed at such advertising campaigns appearing in the ethnic media which have previously tended to pander to a market for sex selection on the basis of this preference. However, the construction of choices, in this context the appeal by advertisements or the mediations by sonographers, are potent examples of how rhetorical notions of choice have come to represent an increasingly diversified yet discriminatory application of choice.

While ethical considerations and feminist critiques regarding the impacts of reproductive imaging technologies have continued since their inception, the medical establishment has attempted to mediate the access to reproductive technologies according to its own perceptions in minimizing its own risk. Of course, such mediations require a certain degree of discrimination on the part of medical practitioners attempting to identify where a potential risk may exist. Discrimination, however, exists not only on the part of those couples seeking to know the sex of the foetus for the purpose of sex-discriminatory terminations but also where hospitals offer the information to certain groups and not to others. The notion of *choice* can have discriminatory practical implications as it allows for boys to be chosen over girls, or vice versa as the case may be, while it also permits the routes to these choices to be paved by an omnipotent medical profession whose own assumptions often inappropriately interpret the realities of those upon whom it passes judgement. Access to the technologies is, for some, routed through a negotiation for access to choice. Access to reproductive technologies by South Asian women in Britain is filtered through cultural understandings of difference and choice.

WWW.SEX.SELECTION

The worldwide web has become an important space in which providers of sex-selection procedures advertise their services. These clinics are based all over the world, with a majority operating in partnership with patented firms in the US and many having offices or clinics also located in East Asia and South Asia. Thus, the internet sites present the services as having a reputable (Western) standard while also appearing to be understanding of the various specific social contexts in which sex selection might be

appealing. These private clinics advertise to a broad audience globally with niche markets targeted by specific advertisement campaigns.[7] The advertisements vary in terms of their target consumer populations, reflecting the variety of cultural contexts and markets that such clinics have identified. Many of the internet sites targeting 'mainstream' audiences evoke references to the 'choice' discourse of NRTs in enabling couples to have some control over the gender of the foetus while also having choices around which methods to use – natural or technological (see www.4-gender-selection.com).

While the ultrasound scan and amniocentesis were the forerunners in the technological enablement of sex-selective abortions, pre-selective reproductive technologies have attempted to sidestep the ethical considerations accompanying sex-selective abortions. These technologies have perhaps made the extremities of sex selection more conceivable for many, resulting in a more widespread practice of it. Reproductive technologies offer choices such as determining or even predetermining the gender of future born children. A simultaneous development has been the expansion of information technologies, more specifically the internet (worldwide web and email) as a medium for both the perpetration of and opposition to sex selection. Private companies offering such reproductive technologies have advertised their services on the internet to niche cultural markets of son preference while feminist critiques of the use of NRTs for sex selection, or son selection, have also circulated their expressions of opposition. South Asia and the diaspora have thus been particularly dynamic spaces in which female foeticide, NRTs and son preference have been vigorously debated and discussed.

Where information on the sex of the foetus has selectively not been disclosed, private 'baby and gender clinics' have filled this gap by providing the scanning services regardless of culture, ethnicity and race, and offer their services on the ability and willingness to pay the private fee. These services are advertised both in mainstream pregnancy magazines as well as in the South Asian (vernacular and English) press in Britain as well as in the US and Canada, not to mention the broad reach of the internet. The advertisements vary in terms of their target consumer populations, some explicitly aimed at South Asian communities while others more mainstream in their appeal, reflecting the variety of cultural contexts and markets that scanning clinics have identified. The extent to which such services are being utilized is unknown. However, the proliferation of such clinics and an increased visibility of advertisement campaigns indicates an upsurge in demand. In the early 1980s one of the first clinics in India located in the city of Amritsar used an advertising slogan '500 rupees now or 50,000 later' connecting the potential economic liability of the birth of a daughter and incurring dowry costs with the option to scan and then abort (Gandhi and Shah 1991). In the US and Britain, the classified sections of magazines targeted at expecting women are often the place where advertisements for private reproductive technological services can be found. In Britain, one might draw the conclusion that the 'mainstream' readership of women may already have had access to sex-identifying technologies, hence the visibility of sex pre-determining technologies such as the Ericsson Method or the Selnas Method in these publications.

The advertising campaigns are telling of a demand for sex-selective services, though unquantifiable. If we look at advertisements targeted at more general consumer markets, we see that sex-selective services are by no means limited to culturally marked or ethnicized communities. The Selnas Method is based on a cyclical chart of a woman's 'energy cycle' to determine when the ovum accepts or rejects 'x' or 'y' chromosomes and gives couples the right times for intercourse according to this cycle to produce the desired sex. The Selnas Method is advertised on the internet (see www.rightbaby.com) and, for a fee of several hundred pounds, one can receive one of these charts with the reassurance from the company and its team of medical experts that pre-selecting the sex of one's child can lead to a 'a happy and balanced family' which 'is the dearest wish for most of us'. The ad describes the Selnas Method as 'Nature's way of gender selection' and postulates that 'there have been endless unproven and unreliable theories on how we might conceive the desired baby, often placing severe constraints on the Mother's health or the Father's purse'.

The desires of a consumer market to have the perfectly planned family without all of the ethical turmoil related with other selective technologies are pandered to here with the opportunity to pre-select. Perhaps the more technologically advanced *pre-sex selection* methods, as here advertised, are more palatable in a 'Western' patriarchal context than have been the 'scan to select' ultrasound technologies. Crucially, however, the gender roles referred to in the Selnas Method advertisement are based on biological terms through the mother's health and father's purse as constraints to other methods of sex selection which are, as pointed out, invasive to both the woman's body and the father's earnings. This, in comparison with the other advertisements targeting culturally marked communities, is a clear indication of a shared patriarchal culture rather than one of perceived cultural difference. The Ericsson Method also offers the service of pre-determining the sex of the foetus through the separation of the 'x' and 'y' chromosomes. In this example, the same company runs separate advertisements for its mainstream market on the internet and for its South Asian clientele in a London-based South Asian newspaper *Des Pardes* in which it regularly advertises. In the advertisement appearing in the South Asian newspaper, it reads: '75% to 80% male success rate, techniques for females also available'. An ultrasound clinic which also regularly runs advertisement campaigns in the same newspaper appeals to its market in its heading 'Is Your Baby Boy or Girl??'. The same company's parallel advertising on its internet site has a hyperlink to another page offering advice to 'working moms' clearly pandering to the desires of the nuclear household and the career-oriented woman aspiring to 'have it all' – i.e. a one- or two-child 'balanced' family size norm. How the latter advertisement is seen as any less cultural in the terms of its consumer appeal is questionable. There is quite clearly a case here for not totally doing away with cultural analyses, but in an equivocal application of cultural analysis to both 'mainstream' and 'other' communities in their shared patriarchal, capitalist and consumerist values rather than their superficially differential ones.

The expansion of this sex-selection industry has profound effects on many different levels. The issues around access and choice which the NHS, as examined earlier, has not been able to address, are dealt with in a precise, strategic and consumer-friendly manner. The commodification of pregnancy and reproduction can be seen in this case to be an enactment of the radical feminist warnings of not only the patriarchal but misogynistic dimensions of reproductive technologies. The connections that these developments reveal between geographical locations, markets and gendered social contexts can be most vividly captured in representations in the advertisements earlier discussed. The imagery and emotional appeal which these representations use tap into specifically targeted niche markets. One clinic has targeted South Asian diaspora communities by their very geographical location in areas of high concentration in Washington State and Buffalo New York, across the US-Canadian border from Vancouver and Toronto respectively, where sex selection is illegal. The same clinic, having found success in its targeted marketing, later established clinics in London, Birmingham and Glasgow accompanied by a regular newspaper advertisement campaign in the Punjabi vernacular print press. Communities and women's groups in Canada were immediately aware of the advertisements and a rather public debate took place during the early 1990s about how the representations of son preference were reflecting upon the community. Fair's (1996) exploration of the female foeticide 'controversy' in Vancouver looks at the ultrasound clinic advertisements in relation to the Sikh community and women's groups in Canada in the 1990s. She looks at the issue of female foeticide as a contested terrain which has been tread over by South Asian women's groups, the medical profession, the local South Asian press and the wider South Asian and Canadian communities. Mahila, a South Asian women's organization, circulated a leaflet about 'son selection' and female foeticide's roots within patriarchal attitudes, demanding the discontinuation of the advertisements in the newspapers. The response was a public one in which voices from within the South Asian community accused Mahila of making female foeticide more of a spectacle for the wider Canadian population by making such a public demand. The advertisements were subsequently withdrawn from a few newspapers, though continued to appear in others, as they still do today. In Britain, the advertisements are accessible across a transnational market, as newspapers and internet and email addresses transcend borders. Thus, people denied the information of the sex of the foetus during the scan by the NHS ante-natal services have a private service provision available to them from consumer-friendly clinics able to identify the sex of the foetus and for women to proceed then to decide what to do with this information.

There are many gaps in our understanding of the private sex-selection clinics. Who is accessing these services? For what purposes? Do they act upon the information that the scan discloses and have an abortion? Are these abortions being carried out in the West or are people travelling to places like India to undergo such procedures? Whose choice(s) does the option to visit a private clinic reflect?

WOMEN'S VOICES, WOMEN'S CHOICES

It would be problematic, however, to assume that anyone discontented with the often ad hoc approaches by NHS sonographers and other staff with regard to the scan or those attending a private clinic would be interested in knowing the sex of the foetus for the sheer purpose of sex selection. As stated earlier, the choices and preferences of South Asian women are not merely defined by culture or son preference. The socio-economic base of son preference across societies is well documented in terms of the pressures exerted upon women to have sons. However, women's reproductive, productive and community roles are continually being negotiated, and while the patriarchal household still forms the dominant basis of the family unit, even in the diaspora, it is also continually being negotiated and bargained with (Kandiyoti 1998). Hence, analyses of diasporic locations would necessitate a more sophisticated understanding of gender formations which could, for instance, take into consideration the subjectivities of second- and third-generation women losing some of the 'cultural baggage'. Whether women's choices reflect their roles in collusion with the family or in contestation with its structure, attitudes toward sex preference are by no means unitary and are certainly changing. As one British-born woman with two daughters, age five and eight, in this study reflected on her experience within her family of not 'producing' a boy:

> I have two girls, and both my family and my husband's family have adored them both since each of them was born. I can't say that anyone close to me thinks that I am any less of a woman because I haven't had a boy, but I know that there is a general attitude, and I mean not just in our community, that it is ideal to have one of each ... It's only because of that that I get teased by friends and family about when I'm going to have the next one… To be honest, I'm happy with what I've got.

Another woman who had recently had a baby boy was ecstatic that her first-born child was a boy:

> I knew the sex of my son after the first scan. I have to admit that I was relieved, not because I don't want a daughter or anything, but just that if I have a son first, I won't feel pressure later on … I know I shouldn't say this but a son is a must, a daughter will be an additional happiness.

This woman's response illuminates the tensions that many women feel in the pressures to have sons. Her uneasiness in the second half of her statement in revealing her reluctantly preferential desire for a son is telling of how dominant discourses of motherhood in any society filter down to women's own attitudes toward their pregnancy and childbirth experiences (Oakley 1979). On the other hand, women can consciously locate themselves oppositionally to such pressures and demands, as the next interview shows in its distancing from son preference as a blanket cultural phenomenon:

> I think it's strange that women would want to have boys and not girls. I mean, I actually prefer girls and wonder sometimes if I would love a son in the way that I would love a daughter … I don't think that's how most people feel, that's just the way I am … boys are harder work anyway … I was brought up in a family that doesn't believe in dowry or any of that stuff, so I suppose I'm lucky to have that background.

Another woman of an older generation, however, might be said to fit close to the bill of the stereotypical 'mother-in-law' in wanting to ensure her family's future through the birth of a grandson. Woman-on-woman conflict within the household is a critical and often underestimated dimension to women's subordination by men.[8] The following interview is the voice of a 'patriarchal agent', or perpetrator of foeticide, and exhibits one of the more extreme and important opinions as it gives a sense of the insecurity and vulnerability that many women feel within the patriarchal project.

> My son has two girls and his wife is pregnant now. I've told them to have the scan done to find out if it's a boy or girl … there is no question that three girls would be a bad thing for our family.

The artificial nature of the power that patriarchy yields to women later on in the life-cycle is exposed when expectations are not being met, in this case the failure to produce a grandson. This opinion reflects some of the 'cultural' undertones of son preference and the natural affinity that is represented by the medical establishment and the advertising campaigns of the private clinics between South Asian families and sex-selective technologies. Without saying so directly, she draws a connection between the use of the scan for sex identification and the choice available to abort. However, hers is one of many opinions voiced on this subject, though this view seems to inform the production of 'knowledge' of South Asian maternity patients in Britain today.

An unmarried woman in her twenties who also identified herself as a feminist at a later point during the course of the interview commented:

> Yeah, I think if the technology's there, and a couple or a woman want to have one of each [i.e. a boy and a girl], then why shouldn't they? I believe it should be their own choice and not the business of anyone else.

This comment draws from the similar discourse as is present in the Western feminist framework in which she sees the potentials for women's enhanced choice and autonomy through technologies such as the scan and other pre-sex selective technologies, much in line with the conciliatory group of feminists reluctant to dismiss all technologies as anti-woman (Petchesky 1987; Stanworth 1987; Boling 1995). Another woman took a rather different stance:

> I definitely don't believe in the scan. I think it's wrong and that those places should be shut down by the government. When I drive by it, I feel sick. Those clinics are

> targeting our people because they know that they can make lots of money from people who want boys only. There are a lot of people like that. It's outrageous.

This woman's comments show a clear understanding of the ultrasound clinic's location and marketing strategies as something that should be de-legitimated at the state policy level but also identifies the opportunism of such clinics in identifying a market in the South Asian communities. In this last interview, the respondent is specifically referring to a clinic which had recently opened along a central South Asian retail area in Birmingham during the course of the fieldwork. This particular clinic is highly visible to the community and has advertised its services aggressively, something which has not gone unnoticed by the local community.

The choices available to women and the voices with which they articulate their desires, plans, beliefs and attitudes show a vast terrain of engagement with son preference, female foeticide and reproductive technologies. Women in the diaspora, as illustrated in some of the interviews highlighted in this chapter, occupy a central position within the public and private discourses on son preference. The awareness of the choices available to them and other women within the cultural backdrop of the South Asian diaspora reflects a consciousness and an indication of women's prominent and manifest role within popular understandings and negotiations of son preference.

NOTES

1. Sunita Puri (2007) offers an insightful examination of the role that physicians play in mediating the cultural dimensions of reproductive health as it relates to son preference in the United States.
2. For an interesting discussion of the visualization of the 'cyborg foetus' see Mitchell and Georges 1998.
3. For a more detailed discussion of female infanticide and female feticide in South Asia and the South Asian diaspora see Purewal 2003.
4. For a discussion of the problematic juxtaposition of South Asian 'culture' upon South Asian diasporic communities, namely in the US, see Narayan 1997.
5. Lisa C. Bower (1995) sharply challenges this inadequacy on both an applied and theoretical level in her analysis of the foetal-harm debates which, she argues, are wrought with representations of African-American women's racial and gender positionalities through the trope of the 'dark continent'.
6. The International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) was held in Cairo in 1994. One of the main outcomes of the conference, due to immense pressure from NGOs and women's groups, was a shift in institutional emphasis away from population-control targets toward a more diversified non-target service-provision approach.
7. An example of a company based in the United States specifically targeting the South Asian diaspora is given by Fair 1996. The clinic offers pre-natal scanning and panders to the preference to have sons. This particular firm has clinics in Canada and the United Kingdom and has benefited from the internet for advertising, as earlier newspaper advertisements resulted in a large-scale politicized campaign in the Vancouver area against the company and newspaper for the advertisements. The internet has proven to be an illusory tool against such opposition.
8. For instance, for an analysis of the women-centred practice of female genital mutilation see Aldareer 1983.

6 GIRL TALK: CULTURAL CHANGE AND CHALLENGE THROUGH THE EYES OF YOUNG WOMEN IN CONTEMPORARY PUNJAB

While academic and popular discourse tend to view son preference in Punjab as a 'woman's issue', little has been written about how women's views about son preference relate to and impact upon how it circulates within contemporary society. The recurring message of 'missing women' in India and elsewhere runs across historical and contemporary representations of son preference, as we have explored thus far. Women's voice and presence, despite being everywhere where son preference and sex selection is discussed and practised, tends to be absent from public and academic reflections apart from within the myopic lens of being either a victim or the self-inflicting aggressor. It is because of this that the orthodoxies of policy and anti-foeticide activism have been able to emerge in the ways that they have. Indeed, far from being 'missing' or absent, women and girls are a significant part of the broader context in which change, challenge and response are shaping the foundations of society through women's and men's gendered locations in contemporary Punjab. It could even be argued that Punjab embodies son preference and thus is, in part, constituted by son preference and all of its multifaceted features.

This chapter will draw upon fieldwork done in Indian Punjab between 2006 and 2008. The focus of the fieldwork is on two educational institutions. The first is a public school which takes children from kindergarten to grade twelve. The second is a women's college which enrols approximately 1,500 women between the ages of 18 and 21. Both of these sites were selected for the manner in which they provide a space in which young

women can communicate with their peers while also sharing their personal experiences as well as engaging with the social world around them. Indeed, the institutional contexts of educational establishments present their own issues and limitations. However, for the sake of specifically looking for young women's voices, these places seemed opportune sites for entry into the field.

During the process of engaging in the 'field' in Punjab and the diaspora, I became aware of being very much a part of the field and not just an observer or outside bystander. In many ways, the perspective, approach and analysis in this book could be said to be an expression of one of the millions of 'missing' voices. In other senses, this book offers a more humble attempt to contribute to the body of knowledge on son preference. Either way, the first person is present in various degrees in this book in terms of how the material is presented, ranging from the literature-based analysis to the reflections upon the interviews. Beyond this, even more significantly perhaps, is that just as I have written girls, women, boys and men into this book, they too were 'writing' me into each interview context I was involved in. My presence was by no means 'missing' or invisibly objective but was a part of the dynamics of the encounters and exchanges that are all part of the evolving and dynamic discursive terrain of son preference. It is hoped that this book does not appear an ambitious effort to somehow 'set the record straight'. The purpose of this book lies elsewhere, in its attempt to highlight the presence of an array of voices in the epistemological field of son preference in contemporary Punjab.

Far from being absent or silent, women and girls have a lot to say about their lives and gendered worlds, having many tools of expression and voice at their disposal in doing so. This quote is taken from comments made by a 14-year-old young woman at a high school in a village about ten miles from Jalandhar:

> I learned about what it means to be a girl through my mother. My *dadi* (paternal grandmother) used to torment my mother after each of my sisters was born. I am the oldest of 4 daughters and my mother has suffered so much because of it. She has the least status in our house, even though she is not the youngest daughter-in-law. We used to feel bad for her, watching her being spoken to like that. All of us felt ashamed. And my father used to blame her. But now we talk back when anyone says anything to her or to us. We are very protective of her. Why are we any less than anyone else? My sisters and I are all at school and are doing well … we get better grades than our male cousins who go to other, not so good schools. We have to work extra hard to do well… One day we will show them all.

This young woman showed an awareness of the generational dynamics of gender power in the household through her perceptions of her mother's experiences as a daughter-in-law, wife and mother of four daughters. Her solidarity with her mother is accompanied by a determination to fulfil certain aspirations to avenge her mother's treatment by both men and women in the family. One might even read this as a radical feminist

response to gender ideologies which support and sustain son preference in its long-term project to 'show them all'. By showing that she and her sisters assert their individual and collective voices toward those who victimize women who are seen as weak for not producing boys, this young woman's determination to prove to the extended family that daughters are equally valuable, if not more so, offers a rather different contribution than that of a 'missing' voice. She was not the first to speak, as she listened intently to what the others had to say before making her own contribution. It seemed that she may have been gauging the tone and safety of the environment for the expression of her views and personal story, showing the astuteness that women have about their positionality and when and where to speak out.

Another noteworthy aspect of this particular young woman's expression is the context in which she expressed her thoughts and reflections. The setting was in the classroom with a focus group of approximately ten young women, with me as the facilitator also present. The classroom teacher was asked to leave once it was apparent that her presence was presenting a hindrance to the young women's willingness to engage in conversations about their personal lives, schooling and general points about their perceptions of their gendered realities. The teacher's presence at once seemed to induce a scripted set of responses around the unproblematic nature of girls' education to society and the liberating impact that the school was supposedly having upon their lives. This in itself highlighted yet another orthodoxy within popular discourses on gender in Punjab.

As I listened to the voice recording of this young woman's comments several weeks later, I became conscious of how my enquiry and interest in these young people's lives elicited various types of responses, some attempting to show their awareness of the orthodoxies, others using the space to voice other points and opinions. In the process of transcribing and analysing the material, my voice at times merged with the girls' and young women's voices and at others I became a conduit through which their views were being exhibited. How could I represent their voices without imposing my own requirements of knowledge production through the calculations of scholarship? Despite my efforts to take into account these pitfalls, my voice merges with the young women's in how I understand and collate the material and how I depict their opinions and voices through my translation. An extract of my reflections on this young woman's particular contributions may reflect on the thought process behind my reflexivity:

> The girl spoke of her mother as the driving force behind her and her sisters going to the high school, which wasn't the nearest to their home but was the best and most outward-looking school in the area. This is why she decided all four girls would study there to have a positive experience to 'build them up'. This interview is interesting from my perspective as researcher, as I was conscious that my presence in the room during the focus group had an impact upon the types of reflections and comments that were made by the young women who took part in the discussion. The focus group was conducted in a high school and some of the other issues we talked about

> were education, social change, how they viewed their position as women in terms of obstacles and opportunities during their education and after. During the course of the focus group, I was brought into the discussions, asked about my experiences living in the US and Britain. Their curiosity of me was equal if not more than mine was of them. The 'field' became a space of connectivity between me and these young women, bridging my experiences of being a daughter, family, diaspora and education to them as they shared their own experiences with me and the group.

This excerpt is taken from my field notes. In presenting my voice and 'gaze' as the researcher through my reflections on the interview material, I attempt to write myself into the field as a participant and subject in the research process while acknowledging how my own views impact upon how the young woman's views are utilized by me. In this sense, my 'gaze' is one informed by my positionality as well as by my exposure to the various academic disciplines and popular discourses that have shaped the field I am engaging with. In many senses, my experience of discussing the themes of son preference and gender asymmetries in South Asia reflects a lifelong interest in the subject rather than merely being a clinically objective topic for research and investigation, a line which is often difficult to draw.

In the meantime, the boys and young men at the same school presented another depiction of contemporary cultures of gender in Punjab. The shyness that they showed, albeit likely as response to my presence in the classroom and the types of issues we were discussing, was a silence which was difficult to overcome. Despite various attempts on two occasions during group discussions to offer different types of entry points into the conversation for them, the boys remained quiet and huddled together in the corner of the room. Their rosy-cheeked, bashful resistance to take part in the conversations showed both an awareness of what was being discussed but also a sense of disempowerment in having a voice on the subject matter. Particularly when it came to mentioning differential treatment between girls and boys at home, something about which their female counterparts had plenty to say, the boys sat with bewildered looks on their faces. The monosyllabic answers to questions addressed directly to them could be read as an inability for these men-in-the-making to understand their positionality or to feel comfortable to express their voices.

At an all-women's college approximately five miles from this school in a market town which is a local hub for surrounding villages, another group discussion was held with approximately eight young women between the ages of 18 and 20. These young women similarly had an abundance of comments and interjections about the gendered context of son preference around them and in their personal lives. However, there was much more debate and disagreement among the group during the course of the discussion than with the younger women at the school earlier mentioned. One woman exclaimed at the beginning:

> We are here to get away from our homes. College is the only route for us to escape our brothers' and fathers' rule. All of their eyes are constantly on us, following us, [watching] how we behave, what we wear… Here [in the college], they cannot follow us.

This comment was responded to by another young woman in the group who had a different depiction of the meanings of young women attending college:

> The opportunity to study at college is something we should be grateful to our parents for. If they have given us the freedom to spend so many hours each day and week at college, then we owe them respect and gratitude for this and should act respectably in how we come and go to college… Girls have to know how to act and behave.

The contested nature of women's education shows how it operates as both a means of access to the public space as well as an opportunity to receive training and potential professional opportunities. Michelle Maskiell's study of Kinnaird college in Lahore in the early to mid-twentieth century noted that this elite institution was a rare college which, rather than merely offering 'women's domestic training' as other colleges were doing at the time, it challenged the provincial government and university welfare policies on women's education by offering other more intellectual and challenging subjects. The college encouraged women to consider taking up professions after graduation and promoted female intellectual equality (Maskiell 1985: 57), despite the pressures and dominance of trends to maintain women within the domestic sphere. Yet, some of the comments by the young women at this college showed that the more 'housewife-oriented' courses such as dress design or home science, were appreciated by the young women as options which they felt were an opportunity to formally learn what they have only ever informally been taught at home, such as cooking and sewing which form part of the home economics major.

The connection between having a college degree and these young women's entry into the job market is, however, not straightforward. Despite access to education and parental support being the most recurring issues that were discussed by the young women during the interviews and focus group discussions held at the women's college, the underlying theme of marriage and, for most, its inevitability in their lives remained at the surface of these discussions. Not all young women attend school and college with aspirations to develop a career. With home economics being one of the most popular major subjects, not only at this college, but across Punjab at other colleges and universities, one might conclude that there are significant cohorts of women whose intention is to attain a degree and the skills of home-making with the view of becoming 'marriageable' material after graduation. The range of courses offered has significantly expanded over the past 10 years with the vocational, home-making types of courses now being seen as options, though offered as stand-alone diplomas as well for those not wanting to complete a BA

or BSc. Some of the most popular degree courses, however, are the BSc Economics, BSc IT and B Com, which points to a number of different trends. First, more young women are entering the labour market after finishing their degrees, either before they get married or after. Second, though tied to this, is the value-added effect of degrees for women in the marriage market. These two demands from the local population show how such socio-economic changes in the region are being reflected in the rising demand for women's education, and also for an increasingly professionally oriented curriculum for graduates to be employable after graduation.

The ethos of the college projects itself as a place promoting a woman-focused agenda:

> When you join this college, you will find that we lay great stress on inculcating a sense of values in our students because [the] proper education of women folk alone can ensure [an] enlightened and balanced society in times to come. (Principal)

This promotes the Women in Development approach of the 1970s in which the slogan 'educate a woman and you educate the family' became popularized in how it targeted women as key players who, despite their subordinate position, were the inroad into generating social development. However, the contemporary context of girls' and women's education asks questions that go beyond this kind of developmentalist argument around education, similar to the strands of anti-foeticide discourse which also has viewed women as victims and targets. Punjab being a relatively affluent state compared to others in India, and the location of both the school and college in the middle of the 'diaspora belt' in Punjab, the meanings and weighting given to women's education need to be viewed in ways which can take into account the complexities that exist around women's access to education and opportunities.

Within the socially dominant community of rural landowning families sending their daughters to this college, the grandmothers of these young women would have worked in the fields in a visible manner during the 1960s and early 1970s, while their mothers would have been retracted from physical labour and concentrated in the domestic sphere of cooking and in the running of the household while also being given opportunities to attend school and college. In one generation a tremendous shift had taken place (see Byres and Crow 1983) which saw women's education and their access to the public and private spheres as one which occurred in tandem to wider socio-economic processes. These young women represent a continuation of these shifts that have been taking place over time and not a sudden emphasis upon the developmentalist argument around women's education. As a caveat, while I have characterized rural landowning families as socially dominant (as in comparison to other groups in rural areas, they are comparatively better-off if not privileged from their structural position), not all landowning families are economically well-off either. Many such families can be capital or asset-rich and cash-poor and thus struggle to afford both the tuition fees as well as the loss of their daughters in the household and its economy to the academic calendar.

Farmer suicides, indebtedness, alcoholism and other substance abuse, which have been reported in the media about men's experiences of agricultural crisis in Punjab, have not ignored landowning men and their families. However, women's own aspirations need to be considered when addressing this question. The survey conducted at the college showed that approximately 90 per cent of the sample of young women expressed a desire to work after graduation, either before or after marriage. The popularity of IT courses perhaps reflects this as an identifiable job market in which women can find a niche for themselves.

The aspirations of college-educated young women in Punjab reveal certain shifts that are taking place. The profile of the college and its ethos certainly reflects its role within the social order in which it operates in supporting landed groups to continue to accumulate and network to maintain their social status, despite lip service given to reservations for 'scheduled and backward castes'. As a private college, it functions as a place for resource mobilization and social networking for families who may seek alliances with other families in the future, thus servicing the local area with a significant gender role at an institutional level. However, what is perhaps more significant is the platform that the college provides for young women to mingle, discuss and debate issues which affect their lives. This does not occur within the formal context of education in the college where teachers are present. It is in the private conversations over lunch, in the courtyard or in the bus to and from college where friends chat, share and discuss their views and personal reflections. It is here that the voices of young women are circulating and developing into critical discourses on gender in Punjab which are by-and-large overlooked. Their reflections upon their personal challenges in attaining their aspirations or in even being given permission by family to attend college are revealing of their ability to voice their opinions both individually and collectively. A strong discourse on the obstacles to women's attainment of their aspirations can be found here. As one young woman commented:

> That will be one of my criteria in who I get married to. I will only consider a *rishta* (marriage alliance) where my husband's family will not stop me from working ... I feel that's my right and my parents support me on this.

Other women shared in this view that they would have a better choice, even if their future husbands were not educated or educated to the same level as them. They felt that their own educational status would enhance their and their parents' bargaining power in the search for a partner. Thus, the college degree was perceived as a point of leverage in negotiating with prospective marriage offers. The marketability of uneducated young women for marriage was also commented upon in the ways in which women seemingly without an independent or autonomous voice can be also consciously sought after by grooms and their families wanting a compliant, malleable wife/daughter-in-law, even from within one's own family:

> My own brother is now looking to get married. He is intent on finding a wife who will listen to him and fit into his life rather than the other way around. It's for that reason that he has narrowed his choice to only girls with education less than tenth grade… While I can see his point, I also know it is because he is insecure about himself… He wants to be the boss of his house. Even having two educated sisters doesn't matter to him. In fact, I think it has made him even more determined to find a wife who is not outspoken like us.

The line drawn by the young women within this conversation about educated and less educated women reveals a connection between their perceptions of women's voice and agency and the experience of attending school and college in enabling their autonomy within their families. Other expressions of critique of the gendered worlds around these young women pointed directly to the differentials between them and their male counterparts:

> There's so much unemployment in Punjab, and boys are taking drugs, hanging about doing nothing, causing trouble, not caring for parents. In my family I think I am the favourite. They are proud that I am studying in college and doing something useful … but yet, my own brothers will be the ones who will stay at home with my parents and bring them down.

This comment reflects upon one of the most overlooked aspects of the contemporary popular discourse on gender in Punjab. The resentment felt by young women about the injustices that son preference imposes upon how sisters, brothers, girls and boys are raised and differentiated is widely shared. A recurring theme at both the school and college which has been focused upon here in this chapter has been an acute awareness by the young women of the delineation made by an overarching ideology of son preference imposing a gender stratifying approach toward the socialization of young men and women. Despite the pressures upon younger and older men to maintain their roles as the providers and the heads of their households and communities, there are many resilient efforts constantly being made by both men and women to ensure the status quo remains. As a young male college student in the 'brother' college to our women's college stated:

> College is just a way to pass time. I know what I am going to do after I graduate. I will look after my family's land, take care of the business side of things and get married. Life has already been laid out for me. So whatever I learn at college is just out of interest. Mostly I am here to enjoy my time with friends before I settle down. It's a lot of fun.

This young man spoke with confidence and certainty about his future, for which the college experience is merely a paving stone within this route to becoming a man. The path paved out for this young man does not seem too distinctive on the surface from that of the young women from the neighbouring college, however. The inevitability of marriage

and taking over the family responsibilities in terms of land and business is something which is predictable and offers little scope for this young man to consider his own aspirations. It may be even said that some of the young women at the college had more aspirations than this young man and were thinking more critically about their futures and the choices that lay ahead of them. Even momentarily, the missing voices seem far more articulate and engaged with their social world than the men's voices so commonly assumed to carry weight and authority. The relaxed attitude which resounds from this young man's comments is telling of his own compliance within his path being laid out.

In comparison, the young women seem far more concerned with ensuring that the next phase of their lives are ones which are planned for, that they are equipped with the necessary skills and that they have appropriate negotiating tools at hand in order to do so. The most striking silence, however, was that from the young boys in the school classroom earlier mentioned who were extremely shy while also seemingly uncertain of what the focus group conversation was aiming at. Thus, while the young women were so vocal and expressive about their views on gender and their personal and collective experiences of being young women in contemporary Punjab, the boys had surprisingly little to say. There may be a number of different explanations for this, including the fact that they were outnumbered in the classroom. However, another possible reason for their silence may have been the manner in which gender relations and the gendered world around them were being questioned and problematized. For most men, young and old, including many women, young and old, the gendered divisions and distinctions which support and maintain son preference have been accepted as an unchallengeable social institution which must be accepted and adhered to. Thus, as young men struggle to live up to their parents' expectations in becoming 'men', many young women along with the pressures to abide by the laws of femininity have had certain freedoms associated with education which have given them access to public spaces extending beyond their own kinship and family networks where they have been able to amass a sense of collectivity through the auspices of their schools and colleges.

These are only a few examples of how young people's voices on son preference circulate and show a presence in the public sphere. While the most overt silences that have been identified here are those of men, some of the most vocal expressions of anti-son preference and anti-female foeticide are held by the very women who are viewed as victims. There is no doubt a plethora of other expressions by women (and men) which show a far more vibrant, contested and dynamic set of discussions about son preference than is reflected in the dominant discourses that are repetitively broadcasted in media, state and other public engagements with it. When we look for the absences and silences around son preference, 'missing' girls and women and masculinity open up important inroads into understanding what constitutes son preference in its contemporary circulation. What emerges is a view of contemporary society in Punjab in which the 'missing' girls and women, in particular, have the tools of both voice and silence in making an important contribution to the shaping of the ever-evolving socio-scape of contemporary Punjab.

CONCLUSION BY WAY OF EPILOGUE

A number of years ago a friend and family acquaintance in Britain, who is actively engaged in cultural activism and Punjabi literary circles in Britain and in Punjab, had a baby girl. As is routinely done, I sent a congratulations card to him and his wife for the new arrival. At that point, having one daughter myself (my second daughter had not yet been born), I felt inspired to offer more than the usual generic card of congratulations. Without knowing anything about their feelings, sensibilities or circumstances, I made a card with a small personalized poem inside it about how fortunate they were to have been blessed with a little girl who would bring them security, good fortune and joy, despite what society around them might be saying. I suppose I was subconsciously trying to subvert what I saw as a mundane practice of ready-made cards with generic messages sent so commonly upon practically every lifecycle moment, which, I believe, fail to capture the complex meanings and specific dynamics of those moments. In sending the card I was also, of course, conveying my solidarity as a woman, daughter and a mother to the newborn daughter and my friend's wife, but significantly routed through him, a man who I thought would welcome such a message of connection and social consciousness. A few days later, I received a telephone call from this friend, who said that the card had made him cry and feel shame at his own feelings of disappointment that he had been feeling about having a daughter instead of a son. His expression of thanks for my words during this time when he had received many contradictory messages from family and friends gave me two distinct feelings. One was that I felt I could, in my own small way, present a negation or objection to the magnitude of anti-daughter thoughts and expressions which had over the years infuriated me though also encouraged me to develop an inquisitive path. The second feeling I had was that small acts can be significant contributors to creating ripples of larger waves of change. There are thousands, if not more, small acts which occur each day in framing and reframing the son-preference question. I have witnessed many small acts and have reflected on some of these in this book, not least in the reflections of the girls' and women's voices in Chapter 6. The recognition of small acts, whether spoken, unspoken or even appearing silent or absent, is a move toward acknowledging different voices in the vast field of gender and son

preference. It is not merely a matter of understanding the causes and consequences of son-preferential attitudes and outcomes, but of conceptualizing the modes of resistance and change that circulate. This book, in its own way, could be considered to be a small act of expressing my voice on a stage of many other voices and acts.

Thus far, I have argued that there is need for more critical examination of the generation of knowledge on son preference. The conceptual tools that we draw upon serve epistemological functions in this creation of knowledge which should not be seen as constituting a one-way process. While female foeticide and son preference reveal certain sinister, misogynistic dimensions, I would be reluctant to characterize Punjab as a woman-hating society. In fact, women are pillars of society in a very active, visible and, in many instances, dominant sort of way. Neither the victimology of the 'girl child' nor the vilification of the Punjabi male or even mother-in-law have been particularly useful in bringing us nearer to any explanations or remedies for addressing son preference. The biases of gender stemming from son preference, which exist in and outside of South Asia, are embodied in so many different aspects of society that such myopic views which rely upon a figure like the girl child or which result in the labelling of particular caste or regional groups as '*kurhi maaru* '(daughter-killing) can only raise the profile of the issue and the group negatively without necessarily offering possibilities for interpretation, action and even change, as colonial and postcolonial experiences have revealed. Women's voices within both public and private discourses on son preference cannot be dismissed as being mere empirical evidence. Women and girls can simultaneously be those who are speaking while also being those who are being spoken about. In this sense, my own location within the writing of this book should have become apparent to the reader quite early on in the text. While I draw upon the standpoints of girls and women in contemporary Punjab and the diaspora, I am also an omnipresent voice throughout the book, attempting to 'speak out' on a subject which, despite being very close to my heart and consciousness – personally, intellectually and politically – is a subject which I had previously found difficult to express my thoughts, arguments and even emotions on. The hegemonic orthodoxies earlier discussed – media representations of the girl child, academic literature within different disciplinary trajectories, the 'logic' of hypergamy as a cultural projection of women's circumscribed kinship, and of government action overtly showing its attempts to redress the gender imbalance – had a silencing impact upon even my own earlier attempts to articulate my voice. The approach of this book, thus, comes out of this recognition of the silencing effects that different types of hegemonies can have upon other expressions of voice. My scepticism toward these various orthodoxies has been addressed in this book by positing the question of women's agency at the centre of the discussion, particularly with regard to anti-sex selection activism and government schemes, but also within the inner sanctums of private spaces including the household and inter-personal, gendered relationships. This book has not meant to discredit or disregard the well-intentioned efforts of government officers, civil servants and other individuals who have been working to address the sex-ratio crisis in contemporary India

at the public level. These activities should and must continue to exist. However, my intention in writing this book has been to delve deeper into and to highlight what I view as important and underlying dimensions of the roots of son preference, the female foeticide 'crisis' and the resources of popular and academic knowledge.

James C. Scott's notion of everyday forms of resistance and the public and 'hidden transcripts' (1985, 1990) is a useful means of understanding the complex nature of hegemony. While Scott focuses upon the dialectics of power and domination between elite groups and the peasantry, we can borrow from his theoretical approach in understanding the ways in which the hegemonies of both son preference as an ideology and anti-sex selection as a hegemonic public stance are articulated and circulated by both men and women in the 'everyday' as well as in media and public discourse. The hidden transcripts of gender and son preference, as highlighted in Chapter 6, often have a strong consciousness of the proximity with which they must exist alongside orthodoxies of activism and hegemonies of gender discussed in Chapter 4. Rather than viewing son preference as a matter of choice of 'to do' or 'not to do' or being a matter of victims versus perpetrators, we might view the choices, decisions and views on son preference to fall within a broad spectrum ranging from coercion, projection, collusion, compliance, consent, resistance and rebellion, with many options available within the area of social activity for social action, social control and resistance.

The ideology of son preference can have other, less obvious, though profound, effects. The self-value and consciousness of 'the second sex', to again borrow from Simone De Beauvoir, determines the extent to which women feel able or willing to express autonomous voices, challenges or disruptions to the orthodoxies around them. One of the gender contradictions mentioned in Chapter 3 is that the archetypal Punjabi woman is seen as a strong and unyielding figure. Yet while the public fury and media-hype about son preference and female foeticide echo around her, we find that women are not only part and parcel of the social milieu which practices sex selection but they are also active agents. This is not a contradiction, per se. It is a symptom of the elevated status that women who collude with the patriarchal project can come to attain in their lives once they have committed themselves to a certain degree of loyalty to the status quo of the patriarchal family unit, thus making them *appear* as strong women but firmly positioned within the unit and not without. Parallel to this, boys and men are also presented with choices to collude or to develop a consciousness which views other possibilities outside of the mould of patriarchy and overt 'men's rule'. Of course, this requires that boys and men are able to envision futures and possibilities for themselves which are willing to sacrifice certain gender privileges and advantages which could, as discussed in Chapter 3, rethink our notions of masculinity and culture.

At the end of writing this book, I imagine a large auditorium, in a metaphorical sense, where I am sometimes seated in the audience, or working on the stage set, as an accompanying musician, as an usher, or even as an actor on the stage, whether as a protagonist or an antagonist. Son preference is not only a topic for observation, discussion

and debate but also a lived experience, a performed ideology and an issue of mobilization and activism which circulates through so many different conduits. We must therefore be able to understand the complexities of the auditorium dynamics before we can begin to understand the scripts of the plays that are being performed. There is not just one script on son preference just as there is not a homogenous audience, despite the persistent attempts to understand it through the various knowledge-production exercises outlined in Chapter 1. This book itself could be understood as a script, in many senses: written, narrated and staged with the voices of the agents of change in the starring role – girls and women confronting and engaging with son preference at all stages of their lives, but also with a cast of policy-makers, politicians, anthropologists, feminists, husbands, mothers, mothers-in-law, fathers-in-law, and others who often exchange roles and who, at different stages of their careers and life cycles, occupy a role in the shaping of the discourse on son preference. In an ontological sense, I acknowledge my presence as narrator (and perhaps more importantly having once been a girl and now a woman) in showing how I am neither absent nor conveniently distanced in the academic language that encases the conceptualization and theorization of this book. It is the tools of intellectual scholarship in which I have found both comfort and empowerment to voice my approach. Yet, it is this very mode of writing and 'knowing' son preference that presents other limitations to engaging with son preference as an academic, abstract exercise, which I recognize and acknowledge.

However, the spoken and unspoken collectivity of voices written in the hidden transcripts on son preference are far more significant that any single book or individual expression. The absence of a visible civil society movement or women's movement in Punjab to mobilize around not only the issue of son preference but also other gender justice concerns is also revealing of the orthodoxy of anti-female foeticide which continues to occupy centre stage without hearing other voices. I suppose this book is my attempt to urge readers to look beyond the dominant or hegemonic for both explanations and policy interventions on son preference and to attempt to look to other routes to understanding women's agency and the complexity of their positions. To this end, the voices of the girls and women reflected upon in this book, while speaking for themselves, are reflected through my narration of their accounts and, as such, convey a series of insights into son preference through both their eyes and mine.

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